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IS CHAUCER'S *LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN*
A TRAVESTY?

The purpose of this article is to examine the new interpretation of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* which has recently been proposed by Professor Harold C. Goddard.^o It is not my intention to reopen the question of the priority of the B version of the Prologue; nor am I concerned with certain amiable strictures upon my own views. Professor Goddard's argument, it is obvious, stands or falls quite independently of the position which he incidentally combats, and I prefer to consider his theory on its own merits, and apart from minor controversial allurements. For the real point at issue is not, after all, the priority of one or the other of the two versions of the Prologue; it is at bottom the question of the permissible limits within which, in the interpretation of an author's work, one may dispense (however blithely) with recognition of the conventions, the preconceptions, the literary *milieu*, of that author's times.

I.

Professor Goddard tells us, in his gracefully disarming introduction, that his paper is a lecture "struck off for [his] Chaucer class" "in the heat of the moment," and that he has reproduced it "in its original and unexpurgated form," trusting that in these prefatory confessions extenuation of any vivacities of expression may be found. He would be churlish indeed who were wholly ungrateful for the vivacity of the performance. But one is none the less forced to the conviction, despite the extenuation pleaded, that the full bearings of the argument can scarcely have been given mature consideration. And inasmuch as it *has* been submitted to a wider audience than that of the class room, under the

^o *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. VII, No. 4, pp. 87-128; Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 47-111. I shall refer to these as VII, 4 and VIII, 1. The consecutive paging of the reprint is more convenient, but less generally accessible.

imprint of a journal of recognized influence and authority, it becomes necessary to take it with more seriousness than might otherwise be warranted—particularly as it rests, in the present writer's view at least, upon a grave misconception of Chaucer's art and genius.

The gist of Professor Goddard's argument may best be stated, as far as possible, in his own words. "What," he asks, "has Chaucer *apparently*¹ done in the *Legend of Good Women*? He has written a Prologue in which he is charged by the God of Love with heresy against love's law, and in which, after a remonstrance so feeble that it seems like an admission of his guilt, he agrees, on the intercession of the Queen of Love in his behalf, to write, as penance for his sins, a glorious poem in honor of good women—the legends themselves being the fulfillment of the promise. What has Chaucer *really* done in the *Legend of Good Women*? To begin with, he has clearly shown his own reverence for love. Then, through the foolish charge of heresy and other absurdities on Cupid's part, he causes the God of Love to make an ineffable dunce of himself, places even the Queen of Love in a ridiculous light, and finally, as penance for his literary sins against the other sex—sins that exist only in the imagination of Cupid—he writes, in the legends themselves, a most unmerciful satire upon women. In other words, *as penance for an act he never committed, he commits that very act.*"² The *Legend* that is (for space compels the rueful suppression here of the incomparable young clergyman), is "a satire, in the highest degree original, saturated with the modern spirit, a poem whose humor and irony are so gigantic, so colossal—one seeks in vain for a word sufficiently large—as to defy description, and yet whose facetiousness is not more stupendous than it is subtle, whose satirical shafts are not more keen than they are unsuspected. Before this achievement, even Swift's 'monumental' jest against

¹ Italics in citations are Mr. Goddard's, unless otherwise noted.

² VII, 4, pp. 100-01. I am quoting from Mr. Goddard, here and elsewhere, at greater length than might otherwise be necessary, were it not that I wish to avoid any possible danger of misrepresentation by isolating statements from their context.

Partridge, the almanac maker, dwindles to the proportions of a mere school-boy's prank."³ But in the first (or A) version this stupendous joke is felt still to be a little less than adequately telling; "it may be asserted, therefore, without hesitation that whatever other subsidiary motives may or may not have affected its recasting (as, for example, the question of references to Queen Anne), Chaucer's central motive in revising the Prologue was this: to increase the irony and satire of what he had written, yet at the same time to make that irony and satire more subtle and imperceptible than ever; to add to the fun, but keep it perfectly concealed; to deepen, in reality, the humor of the poem, yet at the same time, in appearance, to retain its seriousness. . . . If, then, the satirical purpose of the *Legend* be once admitted, on only one basis can the theory of the priority of A⁴ ever be revived; in the belief, namely, that Chaucer, being vouchsafed a prophetic vision of his critics, out of the kindness of his nature had mercy on them—for 'pitee renneth sone in gentil herte'—and deliberately went through his first version, cutting out all the rarest bits, expurgating the subtlest irony and satire, and diluting away the funniest situations."⁵

The arguments brought forward in support of this contention may, I think, be fairly summarized as three: first, the harmony of such a jest with what we know of Chaucer's characteristic humor; second, the implications of the Prologue, especially in the light of the evidence afforded by a comparison of its two versions; third, the infelicitious choice of heroines for the legends. And it may not be wholly unprofitable to consider each of the three.

II.

Professor Goddard's interpretation of the *Legend* rests in large measure, it is clear, upon what he conceives to be the distinctive qualities of Chaucer's humor. Humor, it may at once

³ VII, 4, pp. 101-02.

⁴ B, of course, is meant. Was the printer's devil (like Chaucer and the President of the Immortals) having *his* joke too?

⁵ VII, 4, pp. 99-100.

be granted, is at best a ticklish subject to split hairs about, but the view in question makes it happily unnecessary to lay stress on subtleties. The poem is a joke—"a joke the like of which we shall seek in vain in the annals of literature."⁶ The reproof of Cupid makes no sense "for the profound and abstruse reason that the whole passage is—a joke on Cupid!"⁷ Similarly, with reference to the book-passage in A, "the less appropriate the books cited by Cupid the greater the joke on him;"⁸ while as regards A 229 Mr. Goddard cannot convince himself that Chaucer "did not know what an infinitely good joke he was cracking in that line."⁹ So, too, with reference to the legends themselves, "the more tedious and less lifelike they are, the huger the joke on Cupid and Alceste."¹⁰

Quite in keeping, now, with this characterization of the poem itself, both as a whole and in detail, are the qualities which are asserted of its underlying humor. For one thing, it is *facetious*. The *Legend* is "a poem . . . whose facetiousness is not more stupendous than it is subtle."¹¹ To suppose that some of the legends may have been composed before the Prologue would, indeed, "in one respect, add immensely to the facetiousness of the poem."¹² But the *Legend* is not only facetious; it is *jocose* as well. There are certain passages in the Prologue which, "with the humorous interpretation, only add to the jocoseness and the satire."¹³ And finally, it is also *jocular*.¹⁴ "A desire . . .

⁶ VIII, 1, p. 99.

⁷ VII, 4, p. 114. So, at the foot of the same page, one finds "the possibility of an excellent joke on Cupid;" "the joke on him would remain."

⁸ VII, 4, p. 127.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ VIII, 1, p. 95 n.

¹¹ VII, 4, p. 101. Even granted that facetiousness may be subtle at all, one still asks how it may at the same time be both subtle and stupendous.

¹² VIII, 1, p. 95.

¹³ VIII, 1, p. 91.

¹⁴ It might be added that it is *funny* too. The B version, after we perceive its satirical purpose, is "much funnier than A" (VII, 4, p. 98);

to hasten from the *Troilus* to the perpetration of a joke the like of which we shall seek in vain in the annals of literature—that desire in any one with a taste for the jocular would be explicable enough, while in Chaucer it is really infinitely natural.”¹⁵

Now precisely these three words—facetious, jocular, jocose—suggesting as they do at least the debatable borderland between humor that is fine and humor that is cheap, *do* apply, and that most aptly, to the humor we are asked to see in the “huge joke on Cupid and Alceste”; but unless one may put no trust whatever in the associations that words have, they are among the least felicitous that could be found to characterize either Chaucer or *his* humor. Imagine calling the *Rime of Sir Thopas* or the *Envoy to Scogan* “facetious!”¹⁶ It is perfectly true, I grant, that the desire to perpetrate such a joke as that we are asked to assume in the poem, would, “*in any one with a taste for the jocular . . .* be explicable enough.”¹⁷ But when one is in-

“few aspects of the whole jest would be funnier than the intimation that there were not enough beautiful and virtuous women to fill up even a little ballad” (VIII, 1, p. 49 n).

¹⁵ VIII, 1, p. 99.

¹⁶ It is pure accident that the first reference I turn to for the use of *facetious* is this from John Fiske: “Probably the most tedious bore on earth is the man who feels it incumbent upon him always to be facetious and to turn everything into a joke.” “Nothing,” remarks Dr. Johnson, “is more despicable than the airiness and jocularly of a man bred to severe science . . . To trifle agreeably is an art which schools cannot impart.” “A lion and tigress went through their exercises like poodles,” wrote Scott in his *Journal*. “This is rather degrading. I would have the Lord Chancellor of Beasts good-humored, not jocose.” Dickens’s “Sundry jocose proposals that the ladies should sit in the gentlemen’s laps;” his account of Mr. Bob Sawyer as one who “had about him that sort of slovenly smartness and swaggering gait which is peculiar to young gentlemen who smoke in the streets by day, shout and scream in the same by night, call waiters by their Christian names, and do various other acts and deeds of an equally facetious description”—these remarks, with Charles Dudley Warner’s reference to “the usual facetious young man” with his “mild buffooneries,” give adequately enough the real turn of the words.

¹⁷ VII, 4, p. 99. Mr. Goddard, in saying this of Chaucer, has relieved a comment which it seems necessary to make, and which might otherwise verge on impertinence, of at least a part of its ungraciousness.

formed that "in Chaucer [this] is really infinitely natural"—one feels constrained to ask, *whose* Chaucer?

Mr. Goddard, it must be said, has here again the courage of his convictions. For he gives us without flinching his conception of just the Chaucer who is capable of perpetrating such a joke.¹⁸ "After all," we are told, "*the most thoroughly Chaucerian aspect* of this wonderful poem remains to be mentioned: the fact, namely, that the author conveys to his readers a convincing impression of his own sincere reverence for love, his real regard for woman and trust in womanhood, and that he accomplishes this at the very time when he is letting fly at woman and womanhood his sharpest darts. *What could be more typically Chaucerian?*"¹⁹ That means, on Mr. Goddard's hypothesis,²⁰ one or the other of just two things. Either Chaucer *was* sincere: in which

For does one not find in his own very statement of his theory—present, indeed, as a determining element in it—just that "taste for the jocular" of which he speaks? One feels, at least, that such things as the reference to Phedra as "she . . . who hit on the bright idea of feeding caramels to the Minotaur" (VIII, 1, p. 80); or the allusion to "that matter of [Dido's] going into the cave with Aeneas without a chaperon" (VIII, 1, p. 73); or the remark that "Thisbe had seen very little of Pyramus. The hole in the wall, it will be remembered, was small" (VIII, 1, p. 71 n.); or such a passage (VIII, 1, p. 62; quoted in part below, p. 544, n. 106) as that in which Cleopatra's address to Anthony, after she has "made tracks toward Egypt" [*sic*], is travestied (how justly the reader of it as a whole may judge)—one feels that things like these *are* really facetious, jocular, jocose. But they are Mr. Goddard's, and not Chaucer's—despite the implication that they were in Chaucer's mind. And one cannot help thinking that their writer's own conception of what humor is may perhaps have influenced him unduly in his theory of *Chaucer's* humor, and have led him, possibly, to read into the *Legend* a meaning which he might himself have put there, but which Chaucer (to speak with some restraint) scarcely would.

¹⁸ One gets an inkling of Mr. Goddard's impression of Chaucer, also, in the paraphrases which occur here and there in the article, of Chaucer's lines. The "leveth hem if yow leste" of A 88, for example, is "as much as to say, 'I am going to narrate a collection of old wives' tales; swallow them, if you are big enough fools!'" (VII, 4, p. 97). Compare VIII, 1, p. 58 (top); VII, 4, p. 98 n. (near foot); etc.

¹⁹ VII, 4, p. 102 (*italics mine*).

²⁰ See VII, 4, pp. 100-101.

case he has trumped up a meaningless and silly charge in order to invent an opportunity to do a thing which flatly contravenes his sincerity. Or Chaucer was *not* sincere: in which case he has elaborately produced the impression of sincerity in order, under its cover, to execute a deliberate travesty of feminine virtue.²¹ The first is stultifying, the second cowardly. "What could be more typically Chaucerian?" Again, on the supposition that Chaucer was *requested* to write the poem, it is pointed out (after a remark that "the muse is not, so to speak, perpetually on tap") that "in the whole range of English literature it would be hard to select a poet whom, we might well imagine, it would have more irked than Chaucer . . . to have a poetical task arbitrarily assigned him. *What could be more like him, under such circumstances, than to make sport of his 'requester.'*"²² But to make sport of royalty is dangerous—*albeit for that reason all the more attractive*²³—business. Well may Chaucer have smacked his lips at the prospect and sharpened even more than usual the tools of his subtle humor! Well may he have been discontented with the first draft of his prologue, and increasing the fun tenfold in a revision, have increased at the same time, by a peerless stroke of genius, the improbability of its being discovered!"²⁴ This idea of the attractiveness of making sport of royalty is still more definitely brought out a couple of pages later: "But if the poem is a satire, . . . all of these things are exquisite jests, and, if it be

²¹ See VIII, 1, p. 86.

²² Italics mine. In a foot-note Mr. Goddard remarks: "It has already been seen what he did in the case of another occasional poem, *The Parlement of Foules*." Is that also to be taken as a colossal joke?

²³ Italics mine.

²⁴ VIII, 1, p. 91. For the obvious question, Where is the fun, if nobody can see it?—Mr. Goddard has an answer ready: "For [Chaucer] was precisely the sort of man, I conceive, to write humorous poems content with the thought (if I may adapt a line from the *Troilus*) that

God and Chaucer wiste al what this mente,
or, to use the Wife of Bath's words (for this was a favorite conception of the poet's):

There was no wight, save god and he, that wiste."

Mr. Goddard—one cannot forbear the sheer pleasure of the recognition—is obviously in good company!

allegorical, *the most exquisite jest of all is the implication that King Richard (an excellent candidate for the role of Admetus) stands in need of being saved from hell—a hit, eminently just, and pre-eminently Chaucerian.*"²⁵ Comment is futile. Nor is it only royalty that suffers. "If, as has been suggested, [Chaucer] sent his poem to Deschamps in return for manuscripts sent from France to him, he must have chuckled at the audacity of what he had done. If a writer to-day, at the beginning of a work, were to express his profound indebtedness to Mr. George Bernard Shaw and that work itself should turn out to be a series of passionate love songs in the Sapphic manner—we should hardly take the expression of indebtedness seriously. Yet something, at least inversely, comparable to this is what *Chaucer has had the colossal audacity to do.*"²⁶

If, then, this be the real Chaucer—this *enfant terrible*, with his facetious joke on Cupid and Alceste, his turn for making sport of his young king and queen, his colossal audacity toward a brother poet (in return, be it noted, for a courtly tribute), his show of trust in womanhood while letting fly at it his sharpest darts—then we are indeed indebted to Mr. Goddard for a genuine discovery. But—*credat Judaeus Apella!*

III.

One's suspicion that Mr. Goddard's interpretation of the *Legend* rests on a misconception both of Chaucer and of his humor receives corroboration when one examines carefully his

²⁵ VIII, 1, p. 93 (italics mine). When one reads a few pages farther on of "the marvelous self-restraint (marvelous even for Chaucer) which characterizes the poem" (VIII, 1, p. 97), one wonders what *would* have happened had Chaucer let himself go! Still, even so, Richard would have had little to fear, for, we are assured, "Chaucer is not Swift, and he belongs, not to the cannonball, but to the sugar-coated pill, school of satirists" (VIII, 1, p. 98).

²⁶ VIII, 1, p. 103 (italics mine). The statement that "Even Chaucer was evidently frightened at his own boldness" (VIII, 1, p. 103-104) makes it clear that "even" Mr. Goddard's Chaucer had now and then compunctious visitings of nature.

argument from the two Prologues. I shall not consider this argument in all its details. I believe that it involves itself in hopeless self-contradiction, and if I can make that clear, it will be unnecessary to discuss certain minor points which otherwise might call for separate refutation.

"In order that the God of Love, later on, may put himself in a ridiculous position, and in order to demonstrate the extreme absurdity of the charge he is to bring against the poet, it is necessary," we are told, "*that Chaucer should give clear evidence in advance, before the question of heresy is even suggested, of his own reverence for love.* The more effectively this is shown, the more utterly foolish Cupid's angry outburst of temper will appear. . . Especially significant in this connection is the affection exhibited in B for the flower of love and the preparation for the identification of Queen Alceste with the daisy."²⁷ And so, "to sum the matter up, the entire passage (B 29-96) has an unbroken continuity, the dominant note of the whole being the poet's intense and burning love for the flower, *a love whose every syllable is reflected forward on Alceste.*"²⁸ The object of the daisy passage, accordingly, is to give Chaucer's readers "a convincing impression of his own sincere reverence for love,"²⁹ and to focus this reverence, this "intense and burning love," especially upon Alceste, so that, "when the reader of Prologue B reaches the line . . .

For al the world, ryght as a dayeseye . . .

he realizes that all the love and adoration which the poet expressed then for the daisy was bestowed in reality upon the Queen of Love³⁰—*a depth of devotion, in itself, sufficient to render utterly ludicrous Cupid's charge of heresy against love.*"³¹

²⁷ VII, 4, pp. 102-103 (italics mine).

²⁸ VII, 4, p. 105 (italics mine).

²⁹ VII, 4, p. 102.

³⁰ Mr. Goddard constantly refers to Alceste as "the Queen of Love." She is not that, nor does Chaucer represent her as such. The designation, one may take for granted, is simply an inadvertence, and the fact purely accidental that in more than one instance its use instead of Alceste lends fallacious color to the argument.

³¹ VII, 4, p. 103 (italics mine); cf. also VII, 4, p. 110, top.

It is a trifle disconcerting, therefore, to find that the object of this reverence and devotion is Chaucer's dupe no less than Cupid! For among the things that "Chaucer has *really* done in the *Legend*,"³² one finds noted the fact that he not only "causes the God of Love to make an ineffable dunce of himself,"³³ but also "*places even the Queen of Love in a ridiculous light*;"³⁴ while we have already seen that "the more tedious and less lifelike [the legends] are, the huger the joke on Cupid and *Alceste*."³⁵ Indeed, *Alceste* is, if anything, in the worse case. "The sweet condescension of her manner when she intercedes in Chaucer's behalf *becomes . . . almost more laughable than Cupid's loss of temper*; and the fact that she perceives what a fool the little god is making of himself and exhibits in contrast to him, as she supposes, her own sense of humor *renders her position doubly ridiculous and ironical*. The irony of the situation—*this is just what happens in the case of Iago* [!]*—gets the better of the very one who prides herself on her own power to detect and rise above the irony of life.*"³⁶ And if *Alceste* is Queen Anne, it is at the prospect of making sport of *her* that "Chaucer may well have smacked his lips . . . and sharpened even more than usual the tools of his subtle humor!"³⁷ That is to say, Chaucer constructs and carefully revises the opening portion of his poem in order to make unmistakable his love and reverence for *Alceste*, and

³² VII, 4, p. 100.

³³ Elsewhere it is "an immitigable ass" (VII, 4, p. 115).

³⁴ VII, 4, p. 101 (italics mine).

³⁵ VIII, 1, p. 95 (italics mine). It should also be noted that "the fact that *Alceste* herself suggests the title, 'a glorious Legende of Gode Wommen,' but deepens the irony" (VIII, 1, p. 57).

³⁶ VII, 4, pp. 108-09 (italics mine).

³⁷ VIII, 1, p. 91. Mr. Goddard does not assert that *Alceste* is the queen; but, after assuming that she is, he asks, "What could be more like him [*sc.* Chaucer]" than to make such sport, and characterizes (as we have seen) its implication about King Richard as "the most exquisite jest of all," and as "a hit . . . preeminently Chaucerian." His theory therefore clearly takes into account the possible identification of *Alceste* with the queen. I venture no comment on the logic of the note at the foot of p. 93 (VIII, I).

thereby prove the God of Love a blundering fool, *and then proceeds to play on Alceste herself the very joke the whole evidence for the credibility of which he has made to rest on his sincere love and reverence for her!*³⁸ Alceste may well have been perplexed, one feels, by this "gallant and tactful compliment to [her] logical sense!"³⁹

We have just seen that the elaboration of the daisy passage in B is in order to show unmistakably the sincerity of Chaucer's love. And in this connection Mr. Goddard is very explicit in his statement of Chaucer's attitude toward the flower and leaf poets. "In B all this [the apparent digressiveness of A] is quite otherwise. Here the reference to the flower and leaf poets has the most intimate connection with its context."⁴⁰ The lines addressed to them are now "not primarily an *apology* at all, but an appeal for help . . . In this version, the poet's despair of being able to sing the praises of the daisy is due not merely to the consciousness of his own weakness and to the fact that others have already reaped the corn, but, vastly more, to the hopelessly lofty nature of his theme. It would hardly be stretching the sense of the passage to assert that in this version the implication is that even the flower and leaf poets would be inadequate to the subject. All they can do is to give help and 'forthren' the poet 'somewhat' in his work. And when he asks them to have forbearance with him for his borrowings, he does not seek forgiveness on the ground

³⁸ "On the sincerity of this love [for her whom the daisy typifies], as has been repeatedly said, depends the whole irony of the prologue" (VII, 4, p. 110).

³⁹ VII, 4, p. 94. Indeed, the only adequate expression it is easy to think of for Alceste's just emotions in the premises is found in Kemble's immortal lines, which the Reverend Homer Wilbur once employed under not dissimilar stress of feeling:

"Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love,
But *why* did you kick me down stairs?"

⁴⁰ VII, 4, p. 104.

(as in A) that he is writing in *their* honor, but rather (to use his own words),

Sin that ye see I do hit in the honour

Of *love*, and eek in service of the *flour*

Whom that I serve as I have wit or might.”⁴¹

It is, indeed, these very lines (B 29-96) whose dominant note, as we have seen, is “a love whose every syllable is reflected forward on Alceste.” I have quoted the passage at length, because it is a straightforward, absolutely unequivocal statement of precisely the use which Chaucer is making of the *marguerite* poets, and this use is obviously essential to that stage of Mr. Goddard’s argument. What is one’s amazement, then, on coming to the explanation, eighty-three pages farther on,⁴² of why B is nearer the *marguerite* poems than A, to find that Chaucer’s reason for making these very changes, already explained as we have seen, *was because he was parodying the marguerite poets, after the manner of Sir Thopas!*⁴³ Chaucer is not sincere at all, we are now told. Even the “apology” in A is referred to as “what appears to be a humble acknowledgement to the flower and leaf poets (*though owing to the skilful management of his ‘ifs’ and ‘thoughts’ even this passage becomes slightly suspicious*);”⁴⁴ while the reason for the changes in B is this: “The greater the number of reminiscences of these [i. e., the *marguerite*] poems in the ‘apology’ passage, *the more effective its irony*... Here, then, is a motive which harmonizes beautifully with the whole tenor of the Legend”⁴⁵—a fresh joke, we may suppose, this time on Machault, Froissart and Deschamps. And in fact it is this

⁴¹ VII, 4, pp. 104-05.

⁴² VIII, 1, pp. 102-107.

⁴³ I shall have something to say later of the merits of this explanation. Here it is only its relation to the earlier treatment of the same lines that is in point.

⁴⁴ VIII, 1, 103 (italics mine). To this is appended the following note: “ ‘If I may finde an ere’—he does not say that he *does* find it. ‘Thogh it happen me rehercen eft’—he does not say that he *does* rehearse anything.’ ” I shall advert to this note again.

⁴⁵ VIII, 1, p. 106 (italics mine).

treatment of their work which constitutes the "colossal audacity" at which Chaucer "must have chuckled," if he really sent the poem to Deschamps.⁴⁶ In other words, when the argument requires sincerity, the daisy passage is devotedly sincere; when the argument requires "the spirit of Sir Thopas," the daisy passage is audaciously ironical. That comes perilously near playing fast and loose with one's argument (not to mention the intelligence of one's readers), and whatever the assurance felt that it is not deliberate, the effect is no less subversive of confidence in the procedure that permits it.

We may come now to the crucial matter of Mr. Goddard's treatment of the ballad. In A the ballad is sung by the nineteen ladies; in B it is put into Chaucer's mouth. Why? The reason is given, once more, with the utmost explicitness. "The improvements in B, I repeat, wrought by the changes in the ballad are palpable. In the first place, to have Chaucer, instead of the ladies, praise the Queen of Love will add still further evidence of his real reverence for love and beauty, and will increase emphatically the absurdity of Cupid's tirade."⁴⁷ But that is not all. Cupid has based his charges on the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Troilus*. "But now . . . suppose that a reader of the A Prologue is himself unacquainted with the *Rose* and the *Troilus*.⁴⁸ He will be quite unable, on his own account, to pass upon the merits of Cupid's accusation. He is compelled, in other words, to go beyond the poem itself for its interpretation, to depend on his comprehension of an extrinsic reference for an individual opinion as to Chaucer's guilt—an arrangement constituting a palpable artistic blemish. In B, on the other hand, though the extrinsic reference remains, the blemish is effaced *by putting the ballad in Chaucer's mouth*.⁴⁹ What the author has done might be

⁴⁶ See VIII, 1, p. 103.

⁴⁷ VII, 4, p. 111; cf. also pp. 124-5.

⁴⁸ One wonders, with some bewilderment, for what readers Mr. Goddard supposes the poem to have been written. Chaucer's audience was probably pretty well up on both! "But thereof no fors."

⁴⁹ Italics Mr. Goddard's.

illustrated in some such way as this: If we see a man arrested for cruelty to animals and hear from his accuser a number of lurid stories of his inhumanity, we shall probably be considerably affected, but, till the man has stated his side of the case, we shall, if we are wise, hold our final judgment in abeyance. If, on the other hand, only five minutes before he is arrested, we have ourselves beheld the prisoner (quite unaware that he is being watched) treating with the utmost kindness an old, broken-down horse,⁵⁰ we shall certainly be inclined to think that the wrong man has been taken into custody and to accept with much more than the proverbial grain of salt the stories of his cruelty. It is quite thus in the case of Chaucer in the *Legend*. Things seen are mightier than things heard—especially when the latter are the windy charges of an ill-tempered little god. What confidence—whether he knows the *Troilus* or not—will the reader of Prologue B be inclined to place in the story of Chaucer's poetical transgressions, in the face of having seen him, only a moment or two before, in the very act of composing a ballad in praise of the Queen of Love? The number of improvements flowing from this one change in the B version is astonishing.”⁵¹ I think it is. Let us examine one or two of them.

The purpose of the ballad in B, we are to keep in mind, is to establish Chaucer's sincerity. Its exquisite stanzas will bear endless repetition, and it may be worth while to have it directly before us.

Hyd, Absalon, thy gilte tresses clere;
 Ester, ley thou thy meknesse al a-doun;
 Hyd, Jonathas, al thy frendly manere;
 Penelopee, and Marcia Catoun,
 Mak of your wyfhod no comparisoun;
 Hyde ye your beautes, Isoude and Eleyne,
 My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

⁵⁰ Poor Alceste!

⁵¹ VIII, 1, pp. 48-49.

Thy faire body, lat hit nat appere,
Lavyne; and thou, Lucesse of Rome toun,
And Polixene, that boghten love so dere,
And Cleopatre, with al thy passioun,
Hyde ye your trouthe of love and your renoun;
And thou, Tisbe, that hast of love swich peyne;
My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

Herro, Dido, Laudomia, alle y-fere,
And Phyllis, hanging for thy Demophoun,
And Canace, espyed by thy chere,
Ysiphile, betrayed with Jasoun,
Maketh of your trouthe neyther boost ne soun;
Nor Ypermistre or Adriane, ye tweyne;
My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

Who, now, are the ladies of the ballad? Lucretia, Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Phyllis, Hypsipyle, Hypermnestra, Ariadne all appear. Who are the ladies of the legends? Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis, Hypermnestra. All but two, that is—Medea and Philomela—of the women in the legends are among the women of the ballad. But it is the women of the *legends* who are the vehicle of Chaucer's deliberately planned "travesty on feminine virtue,"⁵² of his "most unmerciful satire upon women;"⁵³ it is the ladies of the *ballad* who are the vehicle of that "spontaneous outburst of praise for the Queen of Love"⁵⁴ which gives "evidence of [Chaucer's] real reverence for love and beauty."⁵⁵ *And the ladies are the same!* One finds one's self, therefore, in a dilemma. If Chaucer considered the ladies as "good" in the ballad, why not also in the legends? In which case, what becomes of his satire? If, on the other hand, Chaucer regarded

⁵² VIII, 1, p. 86.

⁵³ VII, 4, p. 101.

⁵⁴ VII, 4, p. 125.

⁵⁵ VII, 4, p. 111.

the ladies as "bad" in the legends, why not also in the ballad? In which case, what becomes of his sincerity? Yet, *ex hypothesi*, the sincerity in the one case is essential to the satire in the other. The situation is certainly, in Mr. Goddard's favorite phrase, "very peculiar (*sehr eigenthümlich*)."⁵⁶ What is more to the point, the identity of the women in the ballad with the women in the legends is alone absolutely fatal to the proposed theory.⁵⁶

Not content, however, with placing himself once in this dilemma, Mr. Goddard proceeds to do it a second time. It is Chaucer's *modernness* in the *Legend* on which the argument in question lays its stress. "The *Legend*—instead of being a collection of tedious old tales told in mediaeval fashion . . . is seen for what it is: a satire, in the highest degree original, *saturated with the modern spirit*."⁵⁷ The *House of Fame*, on the other hand,

⁵⁶ That Mr. Goddard regards the ladies of the ballad as "good" is clear from his identification of them with the attendants of Alceste. "The ballad in B . . . suggest[s] *the appropriate identification of the attendants of Alceste with the ladies of the ballad* [italics mine]—another improvement, by the way, rendered possible by the transfer of the song *from the ladies*" (VII, 4, p. 126). Moreover, Mr. Goddard's recognition of the fatal consequences to his theory of anything but good faith on Chaucer's part in the treatment of the ladies in the ballad is complete. For he has to consider the presence of the names of two *men* in the ballad, which "at once suggests that this is part of the satire, and, indeed, few aspects of the whole jest would be funnier than the intimation that there were not enough *beautiful and virtuous women* to fill up even a little ballad, and that the poet, therefore, had to eke out with two masculine names. *But this at once introduces a difficulty: if Chaucer has carried his satire, in this and other respects, into the ballad, he is thereby detracting from its value as a spontaneous expression of his own reverence for love*" (VIII, 1, p. 49 n; italics mine). The two men it is accordingly suggested, are left in B because possibly Chaucer, "in transferring the ballad to himself, either overlooked, or, not overlooking, forgot actually to make, the necessary changes." He seems, on the whole, to have forgotten or overlooked a good deal more—the fact, for one thing, that his whole purpose in writing the *Legend* was to render just these women ridiculous and contemptible—as Mr. Goddard, speaking for Chaucer, assures us in twenty-eight pages of his second article!

⁵⁷ VII, 4, p. 101 (italics mine). Compare also: "I should have supposed that the *real* danger in this matter of the *Legend* was quite the

is *mediæval*: "The *House of Fame*, in spite of its delightful humor and in spite of the presence of that irony which characterizes Chaucer's latest art, is a *mediæval poem*."⁵⁸ Indeed, we are particularly told that "a desire on Chaucer's part to lay aside the *Troilus* . . . that he might hasten to *such mediæval themes as those of the House of Fame* . . . or of a serious *Legend* . . . is well nigh incredible," whereas "a desire, on the contrary, to hasten . . . to the perpetration of [our now familiar] joke . . . is in Chaucer really infinitely natural."⁵⁹ Now among the "mediæval themes" of the *House of Fame* to which it is well nigh incredible that Chaucer should desire to hasten, are the stories of Dido, Phyllis, Ariadne, Hypsipyle, Medea and Phedra;⁶⁰ among the themes "saturated with the modern spirit" to which it is really infinitely natural that he should desire to hasten, are likewise the stories of Dido, Phyllis, Ariadne, Hypsipyle, Medea and Phedra. And there is not the slightest difference in Chaucer's attitude towards these women in the two poems!⁶¹ One need not linger over the inference.

opposite of all this [i. e., "that one persists in bringing modern preconceptions to a mediæval case"], the danger, namely, of bringing mediæval preconceptions to a modern case" (VIII, 1, p. 107; italics mine.) This idea developed fully on pages 107-109 (VIII, 1).

⁵⁸ VIII, 1, p. 98 (italics mine).

⁵⁹ VIII, 1, p. 99.

⁶⁰ *H. F.* 239-426, esp. 372-426.

⁶¹ I may refer to but a single point. One of the "interesting facts" about the legends, we are told, is "that a majority of these betrayed heroines either die of broken hearts or violently foredo themselves." But "Chaucer, unfortunately, shows himself in this respect egregiously modern," and we are given to understand that in the legends he is showing his fitness to make fun of unrequited love (VIII, 1, p. 59). Now Chaucer's treatment of Dido's suicide in the "mediæval" poem, is this:

But what! when this was seyde and do,
She roof hir-selve to the herte,
And deyde through the wounde smerte.
But al the maner how she deyde,
And al the wordes that she seyde,
Who-so to knowe hit hath purpos,
Reed Virgile in Eneidos
Or the Epistle of Ovyde,
What that she wroot or that she dyde. (*H. F.* 372-380).

We have turned aside for a moment from the ballad. There is, however, another matter connected with that which demands attention. In order to explain the recognized difficulties attaching, in both versions of the Prologue, to Chaucer's profession of ignorance of Alceste's identity after the explicit mention of her name,⁶² it is suggested "that the whole matter may perhaps be cleared up by observing that *a sharp distinction must always be drawn by the reader of either Prologue between Chaucer the author and Chaucer the dramatic person.*"⁶³ The suggested dis-

His "egregiously modern" version of the same scene is this:

And, when she mighte her tyme wel espye,
Up-on the fyr of sacrifys she sterte,
And with his swerd she roof her to the herte.
But, as myn autour seith, right thus she seyde;
Or she was hurt, before that she deyde,
She wroot a lettre anon, that thus began . . .
But who wol al this letter have in minde,
Rede Ovide, and in him he shal hit finde.

(*Leg.* 1349-54; 1366-67).

Similarly, the account of Phyllis's death, treated as a "mediaeval theme," runs thus:

And when she wiste that he was fals,
She heng hir-self right by the hals,
For he had do hir swich untrouthe (*H. F.* 393-95);

the "egregiously modern" statement is as follows:

Allas! that, as the stories us recorde,
She was her owne deeth right with a corde,
Whan that she saw that Demophon her trayed.

(*Leg.* 2484-86).

The matter *does*, as we are told, "become 'curiously' confusing" (VIII, 1, p. 59). It is scarcely necessary to add that quite apart from Mr. Goddard's characterization of the *House of Fame* its treatment of the theme of the *Legend* is fatal to his theory.

⁶² It is not my purpose here to attempt myself to solve these difficulties, which are real enough. I am concerned at this time solely with Mr. Goddard's argument.

⁶³ VII, 4, p. 118 (italics mine). "It is plainly the author," Mr. Goddard goes on, "who—having, like all authors, the gift of omniscience—tells us that the Queen is no other than Alceste; and this at once suggests that while there is no suppression of the name (in A) by the writer—and none therefore for the reader—there may be such a suppression for 'Chaucer' the dramatic person, who has never had the privilege of reading either version of the Prologue. Further examination of the

tion, as Mr. Goddard himself points out,⁶⁴ is not a new one, and its use in this connection (whether successfully or not is here beside the point) is clearly warranted. The thing I wish to emphasize is that this "sharp distinction" which "must always be drawn by the reader of either Prologue" is invoked in order to explain the serious difficulty connected with the ballad in A. But the ballad in B has its difficulty too. Mr. Goddard believes, in a word, that the ballad in B is represented as actually sung by "Chaucer:" "Taken as a whole," he says, "the lines involved certainly produce the impression that the ballad is the spontaneous expression of 'Chaucer's' feeling at the moment when he sees the queen approaching;"⁶⁵ and he proceeds to argue, even with vehemence, in support of this view. "But why" he continues (and his statement is so gratifying that I must quote it in full)—"why, it may still be asked, if the author intended the ballad as part of the action, did he not make his purpose perfectly clear? Why did he introduce it in such a peculiar way? That Chaucer might have introduced it in a more satisfactory way—in a way easier, at least, for his critics—I freely admit, though that is the extent of my admission. But after all, is not the reason for his method fairly obvious? He perceived the humor which might be derived from a transfer of the ballad to himself. *Yet to represent himself as standing forth at the approach of Alceste and singing a solo, while the ladies paused*

A text tends, on the whole, to corroborate this suggestion. The name 'Alceste' occurs three times in the ballad, but, as is explicitly stated, it is the sight of the *flower* that prompts the song of the ladies and there is nothing either in the passage introducing it or in the ballad itself to indicate to 'Chaucer' that Alceste and the Queen are one and the same." In A 317 "it is clearly the author who uses [the name]," and Mr. Goddard then proceeds to argue, in the case of A 422 (=B 432), that there is "no necessity of assuming that 'Chaucer' [the dramatic person] overhears all the dialogue between Cupid and Alceste;" that there are, indeed, indications "which positively suggest that he did *not* hear it." I doubt this latter point; but its validity is immaterial to my present purpose.

⁶⁴ VIII, 1, p. 118 n.

⁶⁵ VII, 4, p. 122.

to listen, would be not merely a flat denial of the modest and 'fearful' character which he had given himself, but, more than that, would be quite impossible and absurd.⁶⁶ He escapes the difficulty, and solves his problem not unacceptably, in the lines introducing and following the ballad. *For the attainment of a definite effect, he intentionally drops the distinction between author and dramatic person, seeming for a moment to identify the two Chaucers*; but his device should not blind us to the fact that the distinction itself still remains and that it is virtually [!] 'Chaucer' in whose mouth the ballad is placed."⁶⁷ That is to say, in order to obviate the difficulty attaching to the ballad in A, a distinction between Chaucer and "Chaucer" is invoked; in order to obviate the difficulty attaching to the ballad in B, the distinction between Chaucer and "Chaucer" is cancelled! Surely that is to eat one's cake and have it too, with a vengeance; and it is difficult to imagine what could *not* be proved with the aid of so tractable a dialectic.

Professor Goddard's argument, then, both in its substance and in its conduct, seems to be hopelessly at variance with itself—to involve, indeed, its own *reductio ad absurdum*—and it is perhaps superfluous to carry this part of the discussion further. But three other points⁶⁸ can scarcely be dismissed without some comment.

It is essential to Mr. Goddard's argument that he account for the fact that B is closer to the French poems than A, and he

⁶⁶ Italics mine. One could surely not ask for a more convincing exposition of the difficulty involved. I do not, as I said above, intend to reopen in this article the question of the priority of B. I merely wish to point out how lucidly, not only here but elsewhere, Mr. Goddard has shown the superiority of A, at certain points, *on any other than his own assumption*.

⁶⁷ VII, 4, p. 123 (italics mine). How that escapes being juggling on Chaucer's part, I am, in all honesty, unable to see. But I fall back for explanation upon that "complex emotion of which the rare nature of Chaucer was capable," which is elsewhere invoked (VIII, 1, p. 104) to explain another trifling inconsistency.

⁶⁸ There are more. But I have no desire to prolong the discussion beyond necessary bounds.

recognizes both the fact and the necessity. He cuts the Gordian knot in characteristic fashion, by the assumption that the acknowledgement of indebtedness is itself but another of the jokes of which this astonishing poem is now seen to be all compact. His statement of this part of his case is neither clear nor wholly unambiguous, but the argument seems, briefly, to be this.

Chaucer "apologizes to his predecessors . . . precisely because he owes so little to them."⁶⁹ So complete is the irony that "if . . . he sent his poem to Deschamps . . . he must have chuckled at the audacity of what he had done."⁷⁰ Indeed, Chaucer's intention in his borrowings was in some fashion actually to parody his predecessors.⁷¹ Accordingly, in B, *in order to make his irony more effective*, he refreshes his memory concerning the poems in honor of the daisy, and deliberately adds to the number of reminiscences.

It is worth while to examine this a moment. Chaucer "apologizes to his predecessors . . . precisely because he owes so little to them."⁷² The irony of the "apology," that is,—its "colossal audacity," to be more exact—consists in the *slight amount* of the indebtedness. But with reference to the revision

⁶⁹ VIII, 1, p. 102.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 103. Here follows the illustration from Bernard Shaw, already quoted (p. 520), to make still clearer "what Chaucer has had the colossal audacity to do." This audacity is shown, in one among other ways, by the fact that "it is a curious (*eigenthümlich*) way of acknowledging indebtedness to the poets of that [i. e. the flower and leaf] controversy to affirm utter indifference toward *a matter which was to them one of the deepest concern*" (VIII, 1, p. 104; italics mine). The reference here is obviously to Deschamps. One wonders if Professor Goddard's memory of the four flower and leaf poems has not played him false, when one recalls the truly admirable impartiality with which, in those poems, Deschamps takes *both* sides in the debate! If the flower and leaf controversy was "a matter . . . of the deepest concern" to Eustache Deschamps, then that estimable poet has sadly belied himself. Just what connection Mr. Goddard supposes Machault and Froissart to have had with the controversy I do not know.

⁷¹ Mr. Goddard does not use the word "parody;" but his argument is pointless unless that is what he means.

⁷² VIII, 1, p. 102.

of the Prologue we are told that "*the greater the number of reminiscences of these poems in the 'apology,' the more effective its irony.*"⁷³ Just how an irony the essence of which consists in the discrepancy between the "apology" and the facts can be heightened by diminishing the very discrepancy on which it rests, it is somewhat difficult to see. The truth of the matter is that Mr. Goddard makes use of the "apology" passage without defining either to himself or to us the limits of its reference. On one page he seems to imply that the acknowledgement of indebtedness has reference to the entire *Legend*;⁷⁴ on another he manifestly limits it to the lines in honor of the daisy.⁷⁵ The consequence is that it forms in his argument an ambiguous middle. If the "apology" to the French poets is for the entire *Legend*, then it is true that the indebtedness is small. If the "apology" refers merely to the lines in honor of the flower, then the indebtedness is great. But it clearly involves a logical fallacy to assume now one and now the other.

The assumption that the reference is to the entire *Legend* is wholly unwarranted by the facts. The acknowledgement of indebtedness applies to nothing beyond the Prologue, and even within these limits it has specific reference to the praises of the flower. To say, therefore, that Chaucer "apologizes to his predecessors . . . precisely because he owes so little to them" is to shut one's eyes to the facts. For within the limits of Chaucer's

⁷³ VIII, 1, p. 106.

⁷⁴ VIII, 1, p. 103: 'What he has already done in the *Troilus* he repeats even more humorously in the *Legend*. In the former poem he professes to be following his authority with abject servility, when, as a matter of fact, he is creating a unique work. Quite so in the *Legend*. He does, to be sure, employ existing scaffolding, but his employment of it serves only to call attention to the complete difference between his own style of architecture and that of the French romancers [*sic*], between the purpose of his building and that of theirs. Nor do I need to rest my opinion concerning this point on the character of the *Legend*, adequate as such a basis is.' That means anything only if ("*hat jedesfalls nur sinn, wenn*")—if one may avail one's self of "that excellent phrase") it has reference to the *Legend* as a whole.

⁷⁵ VIII, 1, p. 106.

acknowledgement his indebtedness is demonstrably just what he says it is."⁷⁶

We may turn, then, to Mr. Goddard's treatment of the matter on the assumption that the "apology" refers to the lines in honor of the flower. Chaucer *has* borrowed from the *marguerite* poets, to be sure; but "not wholly otherwise (the temptation is to think) did [he] glean after the authors of the metrical romances, and (with his incomparable courtliness and grace⁷⁷) gather up *their* goodly words into the lilting stanzas of *Sir Thopas*."⁷⁸ Chaucer's purpose, therefore, in borrowing from the *marguerite* poets is ironical; and, accordingly, "the greater the number of reminiscences of these poems in the 'apology' passage, the more effective its irony."⁷⁹ This position Mr. Goddard proceeds to elaborate by means of an hypothetical parallel with *Sir Thopas*—a parallel which is absolutely pointless except on the assumption (implicit, indeed, throughout this part of his argument) that the daisy passage is a burlesque.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ I quote without comment Mr. Goddard's note: "'If I may finde an ere'—he does not say that he *does* find it. 'Thogh it happen me rehercen eft'—he does not say that he *does* rehearse anything'" (VIII, 1, p. 103 n). Not only is the fact of Chaucer's indebtedness perfectly well known, but Mr. Goddard himself deliberately makes use of it, three pages farther on, as we shall see, to prove the point he is then making.

⁷⁷ This parenthesis, it should be said, is an ironical adaptation of the interpretation which Mr. Goddard is criticizing.

⁷⁸ VIII, 1, p. 106.

⁷⁹ Compare again (with this statement of the reason for the additions as Chaucer's desire to heighten his *irony*) the earlier explanation of precisely these same additions on the ground that he inserted them in order to heighten the impression of his *sincerity*: "'A large number of the new passages in B are plainly inserted with this end [namely, 'that Chaucer should give clear evidence in advance . . . of his own reverence for love'] in view" (VII, 4, p. 103; italics mine).

⁸⁰ "Here, then, is a motive which harmonizes beautifully with the whole tenor of the *Legend*, and which, applied to Dr. Lowes' argument regarding the relative dependence of the two Prologues on their models, suddenly turns black to white, causing the evidence he has marshalled around the standard of Prologue A not merely to desert that standard, but actually to take up arms against it. Indeed, in this connection, again, the spirit of *Sir Thopas* will not down. Suppose there should

The contention, then, hinges entirely upon the assumption that Chaucer was doing for the French *marguerite* poets in the lines in honor of the flower what he did for the romances in *Sir Thopas*. And I confess at once I have no argument to bring against it. There are points which it is futile to discuss, and this, I fear, is one of them. For one who believes that these two consummate performances—the exquisite lines “in the honour of love and eek in service of the flour,” and the surpassingly delicious fling at the romances—are really in the same vein, would hardly be persuaded, though one arose from the dead.⁸¹

In his enthusiasm for his theory Mr. Goddard has also permitted himself certain rather serious liberties with Chaucer's opening lines. He asserts that the *Legend* is “a poem of which the theme is, to all intents and purposes, *Good women exist*.”⁸² and having thus frankly assumed his own conclusion as his premise he proceeds to interpret Chaucer's exordium, on the basis of this assumption, as a covert insinuation that “no man can be gotten trace of who ever saw, or heard, or became otherwise sensibly aware of the presense of a good woman.”⁸³ Indeed,

come to light, at some future day, a variant version of the story of the Knyght of the ‘semely nose.’ The happy discoverer of the treasure, examining it with eager emotion, counts only half as many reminiscences of the old romances as in the current version. How easy—adopting Dr. Lowes' line of argument—to demonstrate the significance of the ‘find,’ to prove the new text a later and superior rendering! The old one, with its more frequent ‘echoes,’ is plainly closer to the sources; hence the new one must have been composed when the poet's memory of those sources was dulled by time and his eye fixed on his own work; ergo, the new version is the more Chaucerian and the later. *Quod erat demonstrandum*” (VIII, 1, pp. 106-107).

⁸¹ Since only God and Chaucer were to see the joke, it is not remarkable that Chaucer's contemporaries and successors took the daisy passage for what it seemed to be. But it is a little odd that the point of *Sir Thopas* is so clearly seen.

⁸² VII, 4, p. 91.

⁸³ “Well, the proposition, *good women exist* is just like the proposition, *hell exists*. Simply because no man can be gotten trace of who ever saw, or heard, or became otherwise sensibly aware of the presence of a good woman, let us not illiberally infer that no such creature ex-

he assures us, "what Chaucer has done may be formulated in a severely logical way. Smiling benignly on the fine ladies of his day, the poet submits to them this pair of premises: (1) The man who gets evidence from books indicates by that fact that there exists no evidence from experience for what he would assert. (2) I am going to write a treatise to prove that women are good, getting my evidence from books."⁵⁴

In the light of this first premise, it is peculiarly unfortunate for Chaucer that we can hardly acquit him of having taken, in the *House of Fame*, "an actual nap." I shall quote these earlier lines of his, "not in order to hold [them] up to ridicule, but to render all the clearer, by pointing out his error, the real nature of the situation whose significance he seems so wholly to have missed."⁵⁵ He is speaking, as it happens, of the tribulations of a number of these very women—Dido, Phyllis, Hypsipyle, Medea, Ariadne—so that his reference, unluckily, is unmistakable. The lines are these:

But, welaway! the harm, the routhe,
That hath betid for swich untrouthe,
As men may ofte in bokes rede,
And al day seen hit yet in dede,
That for to thenken hit, a tene is.⁵⁶

For Chaucer, whose fundamental doctrine on this very subject is "that we should resort to authority to support a proposition *only when our world of experience gives us no chance to verify its truth.*"⁵⁷ those two lines were a sad slip! "Thy litel wit was thilke tyme a-slepe."⁵⁸

ists; but let us rather, just as in the case of hell, establish the reality of this seemingly hypothetical being by means of 'auctoritee' " (VII, 4, p. 93).

⁵⁴ VII, 4, pp. 93-94.

⁵⁵ See VII, 4, p. 113.

⁵⁶ *H. F.*, 383-387.

⁵⁷ VII, 4, p. 91 (*italics mine*). I suppose Chaucer saw the implications of A 527-28 just in time!

⁵⁸ It is, of course, a work of supererogation to refer to the *House of Fame* passage, or, for that matter, any of a dozen others. For an un-

Seriously, however, Mr. Goddard's tactics here are scarcely wise. For it is hardly necessary to point out that he has again insinuated, in what he calls Chaucer's second "premise," his own conclusion. That conclusion—"I am going to write a treatise *to prove that women are good*"—is identical with the "what he would assert" of the preceding "premise," and the vicious circle is complete.⁸⁹ It is a little hard to write quite dispassionately of such a procedure. For Chaucer is *not* "going to write a treatise to prove that women are good;" he is writing—if one must rehearse the obvious—of specific women who, in old times, "weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves." We cannot, in the nature of things, know Cleopatra and Dido and the others "by assay;" since, then, we have to deal with "olde thinges," let us turn with gratitude to the books that tell us of them.⁹⁰ For a poem whose object is to tell old stories—stories of people whose lives are to be known at all only through the agency of books—the introduction is consummately simple and natural and apt—as, indeed, how could it well but be? If Chaucer's lines can possibly mean what Mr. Goddard says they do,⁹¹ then there is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon.⁹²

biased reading of the introductory lines of the Prologue themselves is sufficient to show that Mr. Goddard, throughout his argument, has simply reversed its real emphasis.

⁸⁹ On his last page but one Mr. Goddard writes: "The opening passage of the Prologue—with its *intentionally bad logic in behalf of ancient books*—is the key not merely to the humorous but to the sober purport of the poem" (VIII, 1, p. 110; italics mine). There is no question of the "bad logic" (I had rather not pass judgment on the "intentionally"). But is it Chaucer's?

⁹⁰ Chaucer's attitude is exactly that of Jean Marot in *La vray disant Advocate des Dames*:

Venons aux dames anciennes
Rommaines, Juisves et Payennes
Qui pour leurs gestes ont eu gloire
En mainte Cronique et Hystoire.

(Montaignon, *Recueil de Poésies françoises des xve et xvie siècles*, x, 250-51.)

⁹¹ See VII, 4, pp. 90-94.

⁹² Mr. Goddard returns to this interpretation later in his argument. After pointing out (VIII, 1, p. 57) that in B Chaucer does not awake,

Finally, in this connection, we may notice briefly the attempt which is made to minimize (as the argument demands) the significance of Cupid's charge of heresy against love's law.⁸³ The *Romance of the Rose*, we are told, is an unfortunate choice, for two reasons: first, because it is merely a translation, and hence no real grievance; second, because the satire of the *Legend* would be heightened if Cupid has slipped up about the part of the *Roman de la Rose* which Chaucer actually did translate. But (need one point out?) the fact that the *Romance of the Rose* was a translation was absolutely beside the point in a century when translations took rank with original productions.⁸⁴ As for the suggestion that the God of Love was mistaken about the

and that, accordingly, "in B the stories of good women, even on the assumption that they are quite above reproach as examples of feminine virtue, have only a dream reality"—after noting this "manifest heightening of the jest," Mr. Goddard remarks that the phrase "my bokes gan I take" [B 578] carries the reader back to the introduction, and especially to the couplet:

Wel oghte us than honouren and beleve

These bokes, ther we han non other preve.

Thereupon he continues: "'Well may I turn to my ancient volumes,' Chaucer seems to say, 'for I shall never find any trace of a good woman outside the covers of a book.' And this shows—what it is exceedingly important for us to notice—that even though every one of the legends be written in a perfectly serious vein, they still serve a humorous purpose and the poem as a whole remains a satire" (VIII, 1, p. 58; italics mine). On the basis of an assumed conclusion a particular interpretation is given to the introduction, and that interpretation of the introduction is then employed to demonstrate the conclusion! It is all strikingly reminiscent of the ingenious procedure which impressed even the youthful Joseph Vance in the famous transaction of the peck and shovel: "I hope you observe that Jack Nicholls accepted Bill's warrant for my Father, Bill having acquired status by tendering my Father's warrant for himself! It was like Baron Munchausen's descent from the Moon; when, having slipped down the rope as far as he could go, he made use of the now useless upper half of the rope to carry him a stage lower, and so on till he reached the Earth."

⁸³ This charge I have no wish, on the other hand, to magnify, nor do I hold a brief for the God of Love. I have elsewhere (*Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xx, 776-77) freely expressed my opinion of that young person's petulance and captiousness! But even Cupid deserves his due.

⁸⁴ Witness Deschamps on this very translation!

actual scope of Chaucer's translation—that cannot, of course, be met. For in a poem where everything means something else, and “nothing is but what is not,” all things are obviously possible. And if one chooses to believe that the poem is a satire because, among other things, the God of Love makes an absurd charge,⁹⁵ and then to argue that the charge is absurd because it is “strikingly in keeping with the satirical object of the *Legend*”⁹⁶—truly, “against such there is no law.”⁹⁷ It is not so easy to overlook the fact that no hint is given that the sentence quoted from Professor Kittredge carries in its own context an implication exactly the reverse of that which its new setting gives it.⁹⁸

The choice of the *Troilus*, however, (we are told) is still worse. “Surely . . . a book given exclusively to the theme of love, is a curious work to have been written by one who cherishes bitterness toward Cupid . . . Furthermore, Cupid's original accusation is that Chaucer is guilty of heresy, not specifically against women, but against love.”⁹⁹ Waiving the characterization of the *Troilus*, the point is simply this: Had or had not the God

⁹⁵ VII, 4, pp. 100-101.

⁹⁶ VII, 4, p. 128.

⁹⁷ Mr. Goddard's anxiety to keep Jean de Meun out of the case (VII, 4, p. 128) makes clear his recognition of the real bearing of the charge, and that point need not be pressed. But his protestations in general regarding the *Roman de la Rose*, and his apparent assumption that the Prologue stands in this respect by itself, lead one to wonder just what account he really takes of the controversy that raged over it in the Middle Ages—a controversy ranging through a long series of documents, of which the Prologue to the *Legend* is of course only one. Christine de Pisan's outspoken and keenly reasoned letter to the Prevost de Lisle well repays reading even today (*Les Epistres sur le Roman de la Rose von Christine de Pisan*, Friedrich Beck, Neuberg a D. [1888], pp. 7-18), as does also Gerson's *Tractatus contra Romantium de Rosa* (*Joannis Gersoni Opera Omnia*, Antwerp, 1706, III, 297 ff.). For a full discussion of the whole controversy see Arthur Piaget, *Martin le Franc*, Lausanne, 1888, *passim*. Christine de Pisan's *L'Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* is considered below (pp. 547-50).

⁹⁸ See VII, 4, p. 128.

⁹⁹ VIII, 1, p. 47.

of Love, *as such*, ground for his charge? Chaucer, at least, evidently thought so. For at the close of the *Troilus* itself, speaking *in propria persona*, he not only begs all women, whatsoever they be, to excuse him for narrating Criseyde's "untrouthe," *but in the very next stanza proposes himself the exact theme of the Legend*.¹⁰⁰ Mr. Goddard has put himself in another dilemma. If the *Troilus* really needed, from the contemporary point of view, no offset or excuse, then Chaucer, as well as Cupid, has made "an ineffable dunce of himself."¹⁰¹ But if, from the point of view of his times, Chaucer's "literary sins against the other sex" did *not* "exist only in the imagination of Cupid," that fact is disastrous to the thesis which forms the italicized gist of the argument: namely, that "*as penance for an act he never committed, he commits that very act*."¹⁰² Mr. Goddard will doubtless say that the *Troilus* stanzas are a joke too. But even so, he is caught in his own toils. For Chaucer *in his own person*, satire or not, is undoubtedly basing what he has to say upon the *Troilus*, which he is just completing; while the whole point of

¹⁰⁰ Bisechinge every lady bright of hewe,
And every gentil womman, what she be,
That al be that Criseyde was untrewed,
That for that gilt she be not wrooth with me.
Ye may hir gilt in othere bokes see;
And gladlier I wol wryten, if yow leste,
Penelopees trouthe and good Alceste.

Ne I sey not this al-only for these men,
But most for wommen that bitraysed be
Through false folk; god yeve hem sorwe, amen!
That with hir grete wit and subtiltee
Bitrayse yow! and this comveveth me
To speke, and in effect yow all I preye,
Beth war of men, and herkeneth what I seye!
(*Troilus*, V, 1772-85).

I have already pointed out elsewhere (*Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xx, 820-21) the specific parallel between the phraseology, even, of lines 1779-85 and the individual legends.

¹⁰¹ VII, 4, p. 101.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

the "joke on Cupid" is the fact that *he* makes a blockhead of himself by doing precisely that.¹⁰³

In a word, it is not likely that Chaucer lost much sleep over the heresy of which he had been guilty in either the *Rose* or the *Troilus*. But he certainly knew that he had laid himself open to such a charge, and there are still those who find charming humor in the way in which he meets it in the Prologue.

IV.

What has been said in the section just preceding has had to do with the inconsistency of the proposed interpretation of the *Legend* with itself. That, like the strictures passed upon the theory, is, in the long run, a relatively unimportant matter. The vital question is that of the consistency of the interpretation with the facts. And that, in turn, involves the still larger question of the attitude one is to take toward the work of any writer who is not of one's own time. It is not, at bottom, the well-worn antithesis of mediæval vs. modern—both (but preëminently "modern") question-begging terms. The particular century involved is after all accidental. The real point at issue is whether a writer, of whatever period, is to be recognized as belonging, in certain of his conventions, his prepossessions, his limitations, his very likes and dislikes even, to his own day, and to be interpreted, where need be, in their light; or whether one is at liberty to ignore all such preconceptions and conventions, and to interpret whatever is due to their influence precisely as if it appeared in a work written today.

I do not believe the question needs arguing on its merits. It certainly never had wiser comment than Chaucer's own:

¹⁰³ As for the suggestion that the choice of the *Troilus* is malapropos because Chaucer is charged with heresy "not specifically against women but against love," what is one to say? What, for instance, was Scogan's "heresy"—his "rebel word?" Why does Thomas Usk make Love speak of "how Jason *me* falsed?" (*Testament of Love*, Bk. I, Chap. ii, l. 92). But it would be to assume ignorance of the laws of courtly love on the part of one's readers to carry the point further.

Ye knowe eek, that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem; and yet they spake hem so,
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
Eek for to winne love in sondry ages,
In sondry londes, sondry been usages.

And for-thy if it happe in any wyse,
That here be any love-re in this place
That herkeneth, as the story wol devyse,
How Troilus com to his lady grace,
And thenketh, so nolde I nat love purchase,
Or wondreth on his speche and his doinge,
I noot; but it is me no wonderinge;

For every wight which that to Rome went,
Halt not o path, or alwey o manere.¹⁰⁴

And to recognize the fact that some of the things which even Chaucer himself has said may seem to us "wonder nyce and straunge," and to say frankly "and yet [he] spake hem so"—that recognition is not inconsistent with a love for Chaucer, and may have the added merit of helping one somewhat to understand him. And nowhere is Chaucer's caution about the need of due allowance for "the chaunge withinne a thousand yeer" more pertinent than in the case of his own *Legend*. The strangeness (*to us*) of certain features of it one may grant at once. *But were these features similarly strange to Chaucer and his times?* That is the question which it is imperative to ask, and this question the proposed interpretation of the *Legend* leaves absolutely out of account.

Mr. Goddard has stated, in his second paper, that certain lines and passages of the legends seem to him, taken as a whole, "to afford overwhelming proof that Chaucer deliberately planned his

¹⁰⁴ *T. and C.*, II, 22-37.

legends as a mere travesty on feminine virtue."¹⁰⁵ This statement is based on a passage of twenty-eight pages which it is difficult to speak of coolly. The legends, one may grant at once, do not always show Chaucer at his best. But one is compelled to the conclusion that no more unwarranted travesty of a great poet's work has ever been printed—even in the palmy days of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*—than that in which the legends are here held up to ridicule. I do not care to criticize these pages in detail.¹⁰⁶ I simply wish to point out that the whole case rests on a total misconception of the matter-of-course attitude in Chaucer's day toward these stock examples of feminine virtue.

The gist of Mr. Goddard's objection to taking the legends seriously may best be stated in his own words: "More than one

¹⁰⁵ VIII, 1, p. 86.

¹⁰⁶ A couple of brief passages will make clear what I mean. Cleopatra has just said:

"Now love, to whom my sorweful herte obeyde
So ferforthly that, fro that blisful houre
That I yow swore to been al frely youre—"

Here is the interpretation offered of the next line: "Suddenly—a horrible thought strikes her! She has sworn oaths resembling this to several gentlemen in the course of her life—what if the wrong one should appropriate this carefully prepared address to himself! Suggestion too terrible to mention! But Cleopatra is resourceful to the last, and without a moment's hesitation, inserts *extempore*, after the words just quoted, a line of identification,

I mene yow, Antonius my knight!—

and the oration is carried successfully through" (VIII, 1, p. 62). Once more (VIII, 1, p. 81): "Whatever is said of Ariadne at first, it must be conceded that she becomes very affecting at the end in her apostrophe to the bed. (How this article of household furniture came on the desert isle—'ther as ther dwelte creature noon save wilde bestes'—is not explained)." "Article of household furniture" is part of the first definition of "bed" in Murray, to be sure; but (not to call in half the English poets) is Mr. Goddard unaware of definition 3? It is perhaps asking too much to suggest a comparison of Ariadne's "perque torum moveo brachia" (*Her.* x, 12) with the "datque torum caespes" (*Met.* x, 556)—in its context!—of Venus's invitation to Adonis; or with the "*mixtaque cum foliis praeibit herba torum*" of *Her.* v, 14. When Chaucer can be travestied after that fashion (and these—witness the treatment accorded Lucretia and Philomela—are not the worst examples) in the pages of a learned journal, it is time, with whatever reluctance, to speak plainly.

of these heroines were, as we should say today, 'women with a past,' and to arrange a scheme of narration that shall spare the reader painful revelations concerning these virtuous women is indeed a mercy. For instance, if Chaucer had been compelled to relate *in extenso* . . . the story of how Cleopatra poisoned her younger brother Ptolemy, might not some over scrupulous reader with a too retentive memory fail to be properly affected by her pure devotion to Antony and by the beauty of her sacrifice to love—in the pit of serpents? . . . Or take Medea! There were probably some fathers and mothers among Chaucer's readers. How thankful, then, the poet must have been that he had Love's permission to omit the story of how Medea sliced up [*sic*] her children—not to mention such other little episodes in her career as the occasion when, to delay her pursuing father, she cut her brother in pieces, and strewed the fragments of his body along the road, or when, promising thereby to restore his youth, she persuaded the three daughters of Pelias to tear asunder the limbs of their father. And then the tale of Progne and Philomela!—*as a legend of good women* with an anticlimax it would have been if Chaucer, bound down to a minutely historic method, had been obliged, after the story of Tereus' cruelty to the sisters, to tell how they in turn cooked Tereus' little boy and served him up, as a banquet, to his father! That certainly would have left a bad taste in the mouth."¹⁰⁷ There is more of the same; but that is enough. It is a very edifying exposition of a possible (since actual) twentieth century attitude towards these unfortunate heroines; it has no bearing whatever on their treatment in the *Legend*.¹⁰⁸ Absolutely the only question which has pertinence

¹⁰⁷ VIII, 1, pp. 64-5.

¹⁰⁸ It involves the same fallacy as Mr. Goddard's remarks upon the word "legend" itself, the use of which he regards as "one of the weightiest pieces of evidence of the satirical nature of the poem." "The moment we consider," he tells us, "two things—the *character of the mediaeval legend and the character of Chaucer's mind* [*italics mine*!]—we perceive that the word, because of its connotations, *must* [*italics Mr. Goddard's*] have had for him, to all intents and purposes, exactly its modern meaning" (VIII, 1, p. 56). That augurs nothing short of a

in the premises is: How did *Chaucer and his contemporaries* regard Cleopatra, Medea, Dido, and the rest?

The answer to that is definite enough. They regarded them as stock *exempla of fidelity in love*.¹⁰⁹ It is needless here to illustrate in its wider bearings the familiar mediæval trick of conventionalizing a single person into the representative, the *exemplum*, of a particular attribute or quality.¹¹⁰ I may assume that as one of the commonplaces of mediæval literary usage, and con-

new philosophy of semantics! The remarkable estimate of the *Prioresses Tale* by which it is supported, however, is scarcely calculated to inspire confidence in its validity. And the citation, on the next page, of line 686 of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is peculiarly disastrous, in the light of line 687!

¹⁰⁹ Mr. Goddard's note on the adjective "good" in the poem (VIII, 1, p. 58) is a bit of special pleading: "Gode wommen . . . *that weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves*" is Chaucer's own explicit indication of the sense in which he is using the word. And Mr. Goddard's remark on the next page (VIII, 1, p. 59) that "Chaucer's principal formula for proving a woman good is to make her a victim of a bad man" ignores the fact that the expressly avowed object of the *Legend* is two-fold: to tell of faithful women, and also, no less, to "telle of false men that hem bitrayen, That al hir lyf ne doon nat but assayen How many wommen they may doon a shame" (B. 486-88). It equally ignores, one may add, the implications of *Troilus*, V, 1776-85.

¹¹⁰ For its interest in connection with the fourteenth century attitude toward the *women* under discussion, it may be worth while to refer to the way in which certain *men* were conventionalized into *exempla* of this or that. The following stanza happens to illustrate compactly a number of the stock examples, which will be recognized at once as typical:

Se tu avoies la vaillance
D'Ector le fort, et la science
De Salomon, et la largesce
D'Alixandre, et la grant richesse
De Noiron, et la grant biauté
D'Absalon, et la loiauté
Du Roy David qui fu loiaus,
Et la proesce de Ayaus; etc.
(Machault, *Voir Dit*, ed P. Paris, pp. 86-87).

It would be interesting to have Mr. Goddard's comments (in view of the incident of Uriah the Hittite) on David as an example of loyalty. I do not venture even to suggest what the logical application of his principle makes of the New Testament attitude toward certain Old Testament characters.

fine myself here to its exemplification in the case of the heroines of the *Legend*. And I shall not attempt an exhaustive treatment even of that; to establish the general usage is sufficient.¹¹¹

Christine de Pisan is a witness of authority and unimpeachable sincerity. Her lifelong devotion to the cause of her sex, and her spirited defence of women against their masculine detractors (among them, notably, Jean de Meun) are too well known to need more than mention here.¹¹² Now Christine de Pisan's *L'Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*,¹¹³ dated May Day, 1399,¹¹⁴ is a document of uncommon interest in the present connection. In response to the complaints of women against their defamers the God of Love enters upon a vigorous yet discriminating vindication of feminine loyalty, especially in affairs of love. The whole poem is highly pertinent to the question in hand, but only a few lines may be quoted. Among the grounds of complaint on the part of women is the treatment they are accorded in books written by certain clerks:

Si se plaignent les dessusdittes dames
De pluseurs clers qui sus leur mettent blasmes,
Dittiez en font, rimes, proses et vers,
En diffamant leurs meurs par moz divers;

¹¹¹ I wish to say explicitly that I am not here concerned with a study of Chaucer's *sources* (see Skeat, *Oxford Chaucer*, III, xxvii-ix, xxxiv ff.; Bech, *Anglia*, V, 313-382; etc.); that, for my present purpose, is beside the point. My object is simply to make clear the attitude of Chaucer's own times towards the women of the *Legend*, from whatever sources the general knowledge of them may have come, or however such knowledge may have been transformed. The Vergil of the Middle Ages (to take one parallel instance out of many) was a rather different figure from the Vergil of the Augustan age; and the heroines of antiquity were not without their mediæval metamorphoses too.

¹¹² See esp. Petit de Julleville, *Hist. de la Langue et de la Littérature française*, II, 360-363.

¹¹³ *Oeuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan* (*Soc. des. anc. textes français*), II, 1-27.

¹¹⁴ Ll. 796-800. There is again no question here of *sources*, and the fact that Christine is writing a dozen years later than the *Legend* is immaterial. The question is simply one of the attitude of Chaucer's contemporaries toward the "good women."

Si les baillent en matiere aux premiers
 A leurs nouveaulx et jeunes escolliers,
 En maniere d'exemple et de dottrine,
 Pour retenir en age tel dottrine.¹¹⁵
 En vers dient, Adam, David, Sanson,
 Et Salemon et autres a foison
 Furent deceuz par femme main et tart;
 Et qui sera donc li homs qui s'en gart?
 Li autres dit que moult sont decevables,
 Cautilleuses, faulses et pou valables.
 Autres dient que trop sont mençongieres,
 Variables, inconstans et legieres.
 D'autres pluseurs grans vices les accusent
 Et blasment moult, sanz que riens les excusent.
 Et ainsi font clers et soir et matin,
 Puis en françois, leurs vers, puis en latin,
 Et se fondent dessus ne sçay quelz livres
 Qui plus dient de mençonges qu'uns yvres.¹¹⁶

Among the most flagrant of these offenders are Ovid in the *Remedia Amoris* and the *Ars Amatoria*, and Jean de Meun in the *Roman de la Rose*, with their cynical skepticism regarding feminine virtue. But (the God of Love declares) their work has an obvious bias; if women wrote the books, matters would be different:

Je leur respons que les livres ne firent
 Pas les femmes . . .
 Mais se femmes eussent les livres fait
 Je sçay de vray qu'autrement fust du fait,
 Car bien scevent qu'a tort sont encoulpées.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Cf. "And of myn olde servaunts thou misseyest,
 And hindrest hem, with thy translacioun,
 And lettest folk from hir devocioun
 To serve me" (*Leg.*, B 323-326).

¹¹⁶ Ll. 259-280.

¹¹⁷ Ll. 409-10, 417-19.

Men of this sort declare that *all* women are false:

Encor dient li felon mesdisant,
Qui les femmes vont ainsi desprisant,
Que toutes sont fausses seront et furent;¹¹⁸

but in saying that they ignore the facts:

Car, quant ad ce qui affiert a amours,
Trop de femmes y ont esté loiales
Sont et seront, non obstant intervalles
Ou faussetéz, baraz ou tricheries,
Qu'on leur ait fait et maintes manteries.¹¹⁹

Up to this point, now, Christine has put no concrete examples into the mouth of the God of Love. But at this juncture she *does*, and it is interesting to notice who they are:

Que fut jadis Medée au faulz Jason?
Trés loialle, et lui fist la toison
D'or conquerir par son engin soubtil,
Dont il acquist loz plus qu'autres cent mil.
Par elle fu renommé dessus tous,
Si lui promist que loial ami doulz
Seroit tout sien, mais sa foy lui menti
Et la laissa pour autre et s'en parti.
Que fu Dido, roïne de Cartage,
De grant amour et de loial corage,
Vers Eneas qui, exillé de Troye,
Aloit par mer las, despris et sanz joye,
Presque pery lui et ses chevaliers?
Recueilli fu, dont lui estoit mestiers
De la belle, qu'il faussement deçut;
Car a très grant honneur elle reçeut
Lui et ses gens et trop de bien lui fist;
Mais puis après vers elle tant meffist,
Non obstant ce qu'il lui eust foy promise
Et donnée s'amour, voire, en faintise,

¹¹⁸ Ll. 423-425.

¹¹⁹ Ll. 432-436.

Si s'en parti, ne puis ne retorna,
 Et autre part le sienne amour torna;
 Dont a la fin celle, pour s'amistié,
 Morut de dueil, dont ce fu grant pitié.
 Penelope la feme Ulixès,
 Qui raconter vouldroit tout le procès
 De la dame, trop trouveroit a dire
 De sa bonté ou il n'ot que redire:
 Très belle fu requise et bien amée,
 Noble, sage, vaillant et renommée.
 D'aultres pluseurs, et tant que c'est sanz nombre,
 Furent et sont et seront en ce nombre;
 Mais je me tais adès d'en plus compter,
 Car long procès seroit a raconter.¹²⁰

In a word, to Christine de Pisan—herself a woman, writing in direct reply to those who delight to show “how that wommen han don mis”—Medea and Dido stand, *precisely like Penelope*, for examples of fidelity in love. They are simply “goode wommen . . . that weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves.” “Plus loyal que Medée”¹²¹ is Christine’s matter-of-course characterization of the deserted heroine of another poem. It was Medea’s *loyalty* that had been thrown by convention into high relief; the rest was absolutely unessential.

For the detail on which the Middle Ages seized (characteristically enough to the practical exclusion of the rest) was the fact that both Medea and Dido had actually saved their lovers’ lives before they were betrayed. That is the emphasis in the *Roman de la Rose*.¹²² It is the same in the long and detailed

¹²⁰ Ll. 437-70.

¹²¹ II, 137; cf. “the kindnes of Medee,” Lydgate, *Ballad of Good Counsel*, l. 115 (*Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, p. 289).

¹²² Onc ne pot Eneas tenir
 Didon, roïne de Cartage,
 Qui tant li ot fait d’avantage,
 Que povre l’avoit recéu
 Et revestu et repéu

account of the loves of Jason and Medea which Benoit gives,¹²³ and which Chaucer certainly knew.¹²⁴ It has striking exemplifica-

Las et fuitis du biau païs
De Troie, dont il fu naïs.
Les compaignons moult honorot,
Car en li trop grant amor ot;
Fist-li ses nez toutes refaire
Por li servir et por li plaire;
Dona-li, por s'amor avoir,
Sa cité, son cors, son avoir . . .
Que refist Jason de Médée
Qui si vilement refu lobée,
Que li faus sa foi li menti
Puis qu'el l'ot de mort garenti,
Quant des toriaus, qui feu getoient
Por lor geules, et qui venoient
Jason ardoir et despecier,
Sens feu sentir et sens blecier,
Par ses charmes le délivra,
Et le serpent si enivra,
C'onques ne se pot esveillier,
Tant le fist forment someillier?

(ed. Michel, ll. 14115-27, 14170-81).

¹²³ Ed. Constans, ll. 715-7078. See Benoit's final verdict in ll. 2030-2040:

Grant folie fist Medea:
Trop ot le vassal aamé,
Por lui laissa son parenté,
Son pere e sa mere e sa gent.
Assez l'en prist puis malement;
Quar, si com li Autors recontre,
Puis la laissa, si fist grant honte.
El l'aveit guardé de morir:
Ja puis ne la deüst guerpier.
Trop l'engeigna, ço peise mei;
Laidement li menti sa fei.

Compare the account in Lydgate's *Troy Book*, ed. Berger, E. E. T. S., pp. 56-122, esp. p. 87. Medea is represented in the same light in the fourteenth century Italian poem *Intelligenza* (ed. Gellrich, Breslau, 1883), stanzas 241, 243-244.

¹²⁴ See Kittredge, *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xxiv, 344-48; cf. Young, *Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Criseyde* (Chaucer Society, 1908), pp. 152-157. Benoit's Medea is a vividly drawn and rather splendid creature (see esp. ll. 1213-1290), of the most approved type of mediæval heroine.

tion in the *Lay de Franchise* of Deschamps, which Chaucer made use of in the Prologue itself:

Lors dist la flour, et chascuns l'acorda,
 Et par beaus mos saigement recorda
 Que sanz amour ne puet estre prouesse;
 Troie la grant tesmoing en appella,
 Et par le Bruth sa paroule prouva
 Et par Juno, l'amoureuse déesse,
Par Meda qui enseigna l'adresse
Au fort Jason qui les toreaulx dompta,
 Par Hercules qui vainquit mainte presse . . .
 Par Theseus qu'en l'aigle d'or entra.¹²⁵

It appears with even greater clearness in another passage from Christine de Pisan, and this time Ariadne is named with Medea and Dido for the same reason:

Jason jadis, si com l'ystoire tient,
Fu reschappé
De dure mort, ou estoit entrapé
 Se du peril ne l'eüst destrappé
 Medée, qui de s'amour ot frapé
 Le cuer si fort
 Que le garda et restora de mort,
 Quant la toison d'or conquist par le sort
 Que lui aprist en Colcos, quant au port
 Fu arrivé;
 Qui qu'en morust, celui fu avivé
 Par telle amour, mais trop fu desrivé
 Quant faulte fist a celle qui privé
 L'ot du peril.
 Et Theseüs, du roy d'Athenes filz,
 Quant envoyé fu en Crete en exil,
Adriane par son engien soubtil
Le reschapa

¹²⁵ Ll. 209-219 (*Oeuvres*, II, 210). And compare III, 242, ll. 17-21.

De dure mort; si le desvelopa
De la prison Minos quant s'agrappa
A son filé et la gorge copa
 Au cruel monstre, . . .
Et Eneas, après qu'ot esté arse
Le grant cité de Troye, a qui reverse
Fu Fortune qui maint reaume verse,
 Quant il par mer
Aloit vagant a cuer triste et amer
Ne ne finoit de ses Dieux reclamer,
Mais bon secours lui survint pour amer,
 Car accueilli
Fu de Dido la belle et recueilli;
S'elle ne fust, esté eust maubailli,
Dont ot grant tort quant vers elle failli.
 Si n'en morurent
Mie ces trois, ains reschapez en furent.¹²⁶

And this conception of Medea and Dido and Ariadne persisted long after Chaucer's generation had passed. Medea (together with Ariadne) reappears in her familiar role in Jean Marot's defence of women:

Jason allant in Colcos, sur la mer
Estant perdu, Médée veult l'aimer;
Mal luy en print, car ung chascun scet bien
Que ce traïstre luy rendit mal pour bien,
D'ont le toyson conquesta par ses ars,
Où failly eussent ses flèches et ses dars.
Thoreaux, serpens mist en nécessité
Qu'il n'y a cil qu'à Mort ne soit cité;
La toyson prist et Médée saisit,
Laquelle peu de son amour se aisit,
Car peu de temps après il la déchasse.

¹²⁶ *Le Debat de deux Amans*, ll. 1455-93 (II, 92-94). Space is wanting for more than a reference to the parallel passage from the *Lay de Dame* (III, 310-11), ll. 67-100. Cf. also Froissart's explicit statements, *Oeuvres*, ed. Scheler, II, 343, ll. 65-68; 387, No. xxxvi, ll. 3-5.

Comme ung mastin qui n'a cure de chasse;
 Sans regarder que, par son aide, honneur
 Il avoit eu, luy feist tout deshonneur.
 Autant en feist Théséus par desroy
 A Aryanne, noble fille de roy,
 Et mille aultres, qu'à présent je ne nomme,
 Ont esté prinses pour se fier en homme.¹²⁷

And to Bertrand Desmarins de Masan Dido was still a pattern of loyalty:

Certainement, quand je pense,
 Femmes ont le cueur estable.
 Virgille, sans point doubtance,
 En dit vray, et non point fable,
 Quand parle du miserable
 Enée, remply d'oultrage,
 Et de Dido l'amiable,
 Qu'estoit royne de Cartage.

Ne dist-il pas verité
 D'Eneydes au quart livre,
 Disant que par loyaulté
 Dido vouloit Enée suyvre,
 Dont, quant vint qu'estoit delivre
 De Enée le malotreu,
 Fut contente plus ne vivre,
 Dont se mist dedans le feu?¹²⁸

But Christine's epistle—from which we have for the moment diverged—was brought very pointedly into connection with the *Legend of Good Women* itself. Hoccleve, as everybody knows, translated (or, rather, adapted) it, three years after it was writ-

¹²⁷ *La vray disant Advocate des Dames* (Montaignon, *Recueil*, X, 238-39). See the reference to Dido on p. 255, and to Penelope and Lucrece on p. 265.

¹²⁸ *Le Rousier des Dames* (Montaignon, *Recueil*, V, 201).

ten, in his *Letter of Cupid*.¹²⁹ After the two stanzas in which he sums up Christine's account (just quoted) of Medea and Dido,¹³⁰ he inserts two stanzas of his own. And the first of these stanzas links Christine's treatment of the case directly with Chaucer's:

In my¹³¹ Legende of Martres men may fynde
(Who-so that lyketh therein for to rede)
That ooth noon ne behest may no man bynde;
Of reprevable shame han they no drede.
In mannes herte trouthe hath no stede;
The soil is noght, ther may no trouthe growe!
To womman namely it is nat unknowe.¹³²

That is to say, the Prologue to the *Legend* and Christine's *Epistre* alike oppose to the attacks of Jean de Meun certain familiar examples of feminine loyalty, and the one poem with the utmost naturalness suggests the other. No one could dream of questioning Christine de Pisan's sincerity. Yet to Hoccleve, who knew

¹²⁹ *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, pp. 217-32; cf. Hoccleve's *Minor Poems*, E. E. T. S., ed. Furnivall, I, 72-92, 243-48. For the date see the last stanza of the poem.

¹³⁰ How frendly was Medea to Jasoun
In the conquering of the flees of gold!
How falsly quitte he her affeccioun
By whom victorie he gat, as he hath wold!
How may this man, for shame, be so bold
To falsen her, that from his dethe and shame
Him kepte, and gat him so gret prys and name?

Of Troye also the traitor Eneas,
The feythles wrecche, how hath he him forswore
To Dido, that queen of Cartage was,
That him releved of his smertes sore!
What gentillesse might she han doon more
Than she with herte unfeyned to him kidde?
And what mischief to her ther-of betidde! (ll. 302-15).

¹³¹ It is the God of Love, of course, who is speaking.

¹³² Ll. 316-22.

his "maister dere and fader reverent" reasonably well, Chaucer's *exempla* present no difference from hers.¹³³

The attitude of Chaucer's friend Gower toward these same antique heroines is no less significant. "Gower had told," as Professor Kittredge has recently remarked in another connection,¹³⁴ "in one or another part of his *Confessio*, almost every story which Chaucer had embodied in his *Legend* up to this time. There were Cleopatra¹³⁵ and Thisbe¹³⁶ and Dido¹³⁷ and Medea¹³⁸ and Lucretia¹³⁹ and Ariadne¹⁴⁰ and Philomela¹⁴¹ and Phyllis¹⁴²—every single one, that is to say, except Hypsipyle and Hypermnestra." And not one of these stories, whatever the immediate purpose for which Gower happens to be telling it, but is consistent with Chaucer's statement of the theme of his own *Legend*; every one of them tells either of women "that weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves," or else "of false men that hem bitrayen."¹⁴³ To

¹³³ Mr. Goddard may of course retort that Hoccleve, like all his contemporaries, failed to see the peerless joke. But it is at least of curious interest to glean here and there among those who didn't share these "secret favors, sweet and precious."

¹³⁴ *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xxiv, 359. Professor Kittredge's summary of the correspondences between the *Legend* and the *Confessio* (*ib.* pp. 357-63) makes further consideration of details unnecessary here.

¹³⁵ VIII, 2571-77.

¹³⁶ III, 1331 ff.

¹³⁷ IV, 77 ff.

¹³⁸ V, 3247 ff.

¹³⁹ VII, 4754 ff.

¹⁴⁰ V, 5231 ff.

¹⁴¹ V, 5551 ff.

¹⁴² IV, 731 ff.

¹⁴³ As a matter of relative dignity of treatment, it is worth while to compare with Mr. Goddard's remark about how "the sisters... cooked Tereus' little boy" (VIII, 1, p. 65) Gower's statement of the same incident:

Thus sche, *that was, as who seith, mad*
Of wo, which hath hir overlad,
Withoute insihte of moderhede
Foryat pite and loste drede,
And in hir chambre prively

Gower, as to his contemporaries, the status of the ladies of the *Legend* required no argument.¹⁴⁴

The eighth chapter of *La Fiammetta* of Boccaccio is unfortunately too long for quotation here.¹⁴⁵ But it is very much to the point in the present argument. Its heading gives a summary of its contents: "Nel quale madonna Fiammetta le pene sue con quelle di molte antiche donne commisurando, le sue maggiori dimostra, e poi finalmente ai suoi lamenti conchiude."¹⁴⁶ Among the ladies of antiquity with whose sorrows Fiammetta compares her own are Canace, Thisbe, Dido,¹⁴⁷

This child withouten noise or cry
Sehe slou, and hieu him al to pieces.

Confessio, V, 5891-97.

Mr. Goddard's reference to "the story of how Medea sliced up her children" (*ib.*) may with profit be set beside Gower's restrained account, with its recognition of the tragic import of the deed:

Medea, q'ot le coer de dolour clos,
En son corous, et ceo fuist grant pité,
Ses joefnes fils, quex ot jadis enclos
Deinz ses costées, ensi come forsenée
Devant les oels Jason ele ad tué.
Ceo q'en fuist fait pecché le fortuna.

Traitié, VIII, ll. 15-20 (*Works*, ed. Macaulay, I, 384).

Compare, too, Boccaccio's treatment (too long to quote) in the *Amorosa Visione*, cap. xxi. In view of the fact that the exact manner in which Medea killed her children has been the subject of rather close scrutiny of late (*Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xxiv, 126-27, 354), it would be of especial interest to scholars to know Mr. Goddard's authority for his "sliced up."

¹⁴⁴ Mr. Goddard, one may suppose, would probably have difficulty in convincing even himself that Gower was cracking a joke in the *Confessio*.

¹⁴⁵ The length of even such passages as I have allowed myself to quote is such as to make necessary their reduction to the notes. They are, however, quite as significant as the briefer passages which find a place in the text.

¹⁴⁶ Boccaccio, *Opere Minori*, Milano, Sonzogno, 1879, p. 127.

¹⁴⁷ Dido scored with the Middle Ages, it must be very particularly noted, on either version of her story. In the present instance, as in the *Amorosa Visione* (see below, p. 563), Boccaccio, like Chaucer and Christine de Pisan, follows the Vergilian account: "Vienmi poi innanzi, con molta più forza che alcuno altro, il dolore della abbandonata Dido, perciocchè più al mio simigliante il conosco che altro alcuno. Io

Hero, Isolde, Laodamia, Cleopatra,¹⁴⁸ Hypsipyle, Medea, and

immagino lei edificante Cartagine, e con somma pompa dar leggi nel Tempio de Giunone ai suoi popoli, e quivi benignamente ricevere il forestiere Enea nâufrago, ed esser presa della sua forma, e sè e le sue cose rimettere nell' arbitrio del trojano duca, il quale, avendo le reali delizie usate al suo piacere, e lei di giorno in giorno più accesa del suo amore, abbandonatala si diparti. Oh quanto senza comparazione mi si mostra miserevole, mirando lei riguardante il mare pieno de' legni del fuggente amante! Ma ultimamente, più impaziente che dolorosa la tengo, considerando alla sua morte," etc. (*Opere Minori*, p. 129). Compare: "Certo io estimo che il dolore della impaziente Didone fosse minore che 'l mio, quand' ella vide Enea dipartirsi" (*L'Ameto, Opere Minori*, p. 226); "Almeno, se amore... sarà cagione che i miei giorni si raccorcino, me ne seguirà che io, come Dido, con dolorosa fama diventerò eterna" (*La Fiammetta, Opere Minori*, p. 77; cf. p. 230). In the *De Claris Mulieribus*, on the other hand, Boccaccio makes use of the pre-Vergilian version, and Dido, "hethen" though she was, becomes an illustrious example to Christian women. The passage deserves quotation in full—if for no other reason than that it may well have suggested the "yit they weren hethen, al the pak," of A 299—but its length forbids. The following sentences, however, will give its tone: "O pudicitiae inviolatum decus, viduitatis infractae venerandum aeternumque specimen, Dido in te velim ingerant oculos viduae mulieres, et potissime Cristianae, tuum robur inspiciant, te si castissimum effundentem sanguinem tota mente considerent, et hae potissimum quibus fuit, ne ad secundam solum dicam, sed ad tertiam et ad ulteriora etiam vota transvolasse levissimum. Quid inquierent, queso spectantes Christi insignite caractere, si exteram mulierem gentilem infidelem, cui omnino Christus incognitus ad consequendam parituramque laudem, tam perseveranti animo, tam forti pectere in mortem usque pergere non aliena, sed sua illatam manu antequam in secundas nuptias iret, antequam observantiae venerandissimum propositum violari permetteret... Imo et ipsa Dido erat ne saxea ac lignea magis quam hoderniae sint, non equidem ergo mente saltem valens, cuius non arbitrabatur posse viribus evitare illecebras, moriens ea via qua potuit evitavit. Sed nobis qui nos tam desertos dicimus, nonne si Christus refugium est, ipse quidem redemptor pius in se sperantibus semper adest, an putas qui pueros de camino ignis eripuit, qui Susannam do falso crimine liberavit, te de manibus adversantium non possit auferre si vetis?... Gentilis foemina ob inanem gloriam fervori suo imperare potuit, et leges imponere, Christiana ut consequeretur, aeterna imperare non potest? Heu mihi dum fallere deum talibus arbitramur, nosipsos et honori caduco (ut aeternum sinam) subtrahimus et in praecipitium aeternae damnationis impellimus. Erubescant ergo intuentes Didonis cadaver exinanire, ut dum causam mortis excogitant vultus deiciant, dolentes quod a membro Diaboli Christiculae pudicitia superentur." (*De Claris Mulieribus*, Berne, 1539, fol. 28v-29r). Boc-

Ariadne—all of them in the ballad, and six of them among the ten heroines of the legends. And once more, in every instance, the burden of Fiammetta's lament is the theme of the *Legend*—the faithfulness of women, or the treachery of men “that hem bitrayen.”¹⁴⁸

caccio refers to both versions of Dido's story in the *Geneologia deorum*, lib. ii, cap. lx.

¹⁴⁸ Boccaccio does not blink, either here or in the *De Claris Mulieribus*, Cleopatra's delinquencies; but she was none the less to him, as she was to Petrarch and Chaucer and Shakspeare—to name no more—one of the world's great lovers. Space again forbids the citation of all of Fiammetta's exposition of the “pene intollerabile” of Cleopatra; the closing sentences are as follows: “Ma quello che per sua gravissima ed estrema doglia s'aggiugne, è l'essere stata moglie d'Antonio, il quale ella con le sue libidinose lusinghe aveva a cittadine guerre incitato contro il suo fratello, quasi, di quelle vittoria sperando, aspirasse all'altezza del romano imperio; ma venutole di ciò ad un' ora doppia perdita, cioè quella del morto marito, e della spogliata speranza, lei dolorosissima oltre ad ogni altra femmina esser rimasa si crede. E certo, considerando sì alto intendimento venir meno per una disavventurata battaglia, quale è il dovere esser general donna di tutto il circuito della terra, senza aggiugnervi il perdere così caro marito, è da credere esser dolorosissima cosa; ma ella a ciò trovò subitamente quella sola medicina che v'era a spegnere il suo dolore, cioè la morte, la quale ancor che rigida posse, non si distese però in lungo spazio; perciocchè in piccola ora possono per le poppe due serpenti trar d'un corpo il sangue e la vita” (*Opere minori*, p. 135).

¹⁴⁹ It is not only to find parallels for her own grief that Fiammetta recurs to the tragic fortunes of her heroines; in and for themselves they stand—certain significant names among them—as exemplars of the splendor of the antique world. In a remarkable passage Fiammetta resumes the glories of her own city: “La nostra città, oltre a tutte l'altre italiche, di lietissime feste abbondevole, non solamente rallegra i suoi cittadini o con le nozze o con li bagni o con li marini liti, ma, copiosa di molti giuochi, sovente or con uno, or con un altro letifica la sua gente: ma tra l'altre cose, nelle quali essa apparare splendidissima, è nel sovente armeggiare.” After a brief picture of the gathering, in the spring days, for the tourney, Fiammetta comes to the “store of ladies, whose bright eyes rain influence.” And it is interesting to observe the means she uses to add lustre to the fame of her townswomen: “Non credo che più nobile o più ricca cosa fosse a riguardar le nuore di Priamo con l'altre frigie donne qualora più ornate davanti al suocero loro a festeggiar s'adunavano, che sieno in più luoghi della nostra città le nostre

Such formal passages as I have cited (and it would be easy to add to them) make clear enough the mediæval point of view with reference to the women of the *Legend*. But no less significant, if only for the fact that they *are* incidental and matter-of-course—are the frequent references that appear in fourteenth century writings to the heroines of the *Legend* as accepted standards of comparison for the poet's use in rehearsing the virtues of his own lady. Deschamps writes, in the *Lay de Department*, of his lady—"celle que je desir D'ardent desir De cuer vray"—in terms which, on Mr. Goddard's hypothesis, would be anything but complimentary:

Car de Dydo ne d'Elaine,
De Judith la souveraine,
Ne d'Ester ne de Tysbée,
De Lucesse la Rommaine,
Ne d'Ecuba la certaine,

Sarre loial ne Medée
Ne pourroit estre trouvée
Dame de tant de biens plaine:
C'est l'estoille trasmontaine,
Aurora la désirée.¹⁵⁰

cittadine a vedere; le quali, poichè a' teatri in grandissima quantità ragunate si veggono... non dubito che qualunque forestiere intendente sopravvenisse, considerate le contenenze altiere, i costumi notabili, gli ornamenti piuttosto reali che convenevoli ad altre donne, non giudicasse noi non moderne donne, ma di quell' antiche magnifiche essere al mondo tornate, quella per alterezza, dicendo, Semiramis somiglierebbe: quell' altra, agli ornamenti guardando, Cleopatra si crederebbe: l'altra, considerata la sua vaghezza, sarebbe creduta Elena: ed alcuna, gli atti suoi ben mirando, in niente si direbbe dissimigliante a Didone. Perchè vo io somigliandole tutte? Ciascuna per sè medesima parrebbe una cosa piena di divina maestà, non che d'umana." (*Opere minori*, pp. 84-85.) Simply as a further illustration of the matter-of-course attitude toward Cleopatra and Dido—even the "divina maestà" belongs to them by implication—the passage is not without significance.

¹⁵⁰ *Oeuvres*, II, 336 (No. cccxiii, ll. 17-26).

The juxtapositions are even more interesting in one of the *balades*:

Judith en fais, Lucesse en voulenté
Rebeque en sens, en noblesce Ecuba,
Sarre loyal et Helaine en biauté,
Plaisant Hester et royne de Sabba,
En ferme foy et en sainté Anna,
Semiramis pour gouverner contrée,
Et pour honneur et gens veoir Martha,
Dydo, Palas, Juno, Penelopée,

Marie en grace et en humilité,
En doulx maintien et en gent corps Flora,
Marguerite en coulour et purté,
Pure estoille, clere comme Aurora,
Desirée trop plus que Medea,
Katherine vous a endoctrinée,
Qui, en tous lieux, appeller vous fera
Dydo, Palas, Juno, Penelopee.¹⁵¹

And one may add the *balade*¹⁵² to which Professor Skeat refers¹⁵³ in connection with the ballad of the Prologue:

Hester, Judith, Penelopé, Helaine,
Sarre, Tisbé, Rebeque et Sarry,
Lucresce, Yseult, Genevre, chastellaine
La très loyal nommée de Vergy,
Rachel aussi, la dame de Fayel
On ne furent sy precieux jouel
D'onneur, bonté, senz, beauté et valour
Con est ma très doulce dame d'onnour.

Se d'Absalon la grant beauté humaine,
De Salomon tout senz sanz demy, etc.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ *Oeuvres*, III, 303-04 (No. cccclxxxii, ll. 1-16).

¹⁵² Given in full in Deschamps, *Oeuvres*, X, xlix-1.

¹⁵³ *Oxford Chaucer*, III, 298.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. also No. mclxxiv (*Oeuvres*, VII, 13).

Similarly Froissart writes:

Ne quier veoir Medée ne Jason,
 Ne trop avant lire ens on mapemonde,
 Ne la musique Orpheüs ne le son,
 Ne Herculês, qui cercha tout le monde,
 Ne Lucesse, qui tant fu bonne et monde,
 Ne Penelope aussi, car, par saint Jame,
 Je voi assés, puisque je voi ma dame.¹⁵⁵

Nor is Lydgate to be outdone:

For good she is, lyk to Policene,
 And, in fairnesse, to the quene Helayne;
 Stedfast of herte, as was Dorigene,
 And wyfly trouthe, if I shal not fayne:
 In constaunce eke and faith, she may attayne
 To Cleopatre; and therto as secree
 As was of Troye the whyte Antigone;

As Hester meke; lyk Judith of prudence;
 Kynde as Alceste or Marcia Catoun;
 And to Grisilde lyk in pacience,
 And Ariadne, of discrecioun;
 And to Lucrece, that was of Rome toun,
 She may be lykned, as for honestè;
 And, for her faith, unto Penelope.

To faire Phyllis and to Hipsiphilee,
 For innocence and for womanhede;
 For seemlinesse, unto Canacee;
 And over al this, to speke of goodlihede,
 She passeth alle that I can of rede;
 For worde and dede, that she naught ne falle,
 Acorde in vertue, and her werkes alle.

¹⁵⁵ *Oeuvres*, ed. Scheler, II, 369.

For though that Dydo, with [her] witte sage,
Was in her tyme stedfast to Enee,
Of hastinesse yet she did outrage;
And so for Jason did also Medee.
But my lady is so avisee
That, bountee and beautee bothe in her demeyne,
She maketh bountee alway soverayne.¹⁵⁶

The constant appearance of the heroines of the legends (or of the ballad) in the conventional lists of lovers or on the pictured walls abounding in mediæval poems is a fact of no less pertinence.¹⁵⁷ In the *Amorosa Visione*—which might equally well have been considered in connection with *La Fiammetta*—Boccaccio sees depicted in the great hall, together with the philosophers and poets,¹⁵⁸ seven of the ten ladies of the *Legend*: Cleopatra,¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, pp. 271-72. See also *ib.*, p. 289, ll. 106-119:

Touching of women the parfit innocence,
Thogh they had of Hestre the mekenes,
Or of Griseldes [the] humble pacience,
Or of Judith the proved stablenes,
Or Policenes virginal clennes,
Yit dar I say and truste right wel this,
A wikked tonge wol alway deme amis.

The wyfly trouthe of Penelope,
Though they it hadde in hir possessioun,
Eleyne's beautè, the kindnes of Medee,
The love unfeyned of Marcia Catoun,
Or of Alceste the trewe affeccioun,
Yit dar I say and truste right wel this,
A wikked tonge wol alway deme amis.

Add Lydgate's *New Year's Valentine*, just printed by Miss Hammond in *Anglia*, xxxii—esp. p. 195, the lines beginning:

For sheo passeg of beaute Isoude and Eleyne.

¹⁵⁷ It is needless, of course, to refer to *Book of the Duchesse*, ll. 326-31, and *Parlement of Foules*, ll. 288-92.

¹⁵⁸ See caps. iv-v.

¹⁵⁹ Cap. x (ed. Moutier, p. 43). Cleopatra, it should be said, is included among the followers of Fame, rather than among the lovers.

Thisbe,¹⁶⁰ Hypsipyle and Medea,¹⁶¹ Ariadne,¹⁶² Phyllis,¹⁶³ and Dido¹⁶⁴ (all, that is, except Lucretia, Hypermnestra, and Philomela,) and thirteen out of the eighteen ladies of the ballad.¹⁶⁵ Cleopatra, Ariadne, Phyllis, Medea, Hypsipyle, Helen, Laodamia, Hypermnestra, Thisbe, Isolde, and Hero appear in Petrarch's *Trionfo d' Amore*;¹⁶⁶ Medea, Dido, Polixena, and Penelope in the *Intelligenza*;¹⁶⁷ Medea, Helen, Isolde, Hero, and Polixena in the *Paradys d'Amours*;¹⁶⁸ Medea, Helen, Dido, and Isolde in Deschamps's *Lay Amoureux*;¹⁶⁹ Isolde, Helen, Dido, Phyllis, Ariadne, Medea, Cleopatra, Thisbe, Philomela, Canace, Polixena, Penelope, and Lucretia in the eighth book of the *Confessio Amantis*;¹⁷⁰ Dido, Medea, Penelope, Isolde, Thisbe, Phyllis, Helen, Polixena, Philomela, and Lucretia in the *Temple of Glas*;¹⁷¹ Medea, Phyllis, Dido, and Thisbe in *Reason and Sensuality*.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁰ Cap. xxi (pp. 82-84). The story of Pyramus and Thisbe was of course a favorite one. See, among others, Robert of Blois (ed. Ulrich, pp. 55-56); *Poésies du Roi de Navarre*, II, 68-69; Machault, *Voir Dit*, p. 270; and especially an anonymous thirteenth century poem quoted in *Hist. littér. de la France*, XXIII, 813.

¹⁶¹ Cap. xxi (pp. 85-88); cf. cap. ix (p. 38). It is worth noting that in the *Amorosa Visione* as in the *Legend* Hypsipyle and Medea are treated together.

¹⁶² Cap. xxii (p. 89).

¹⁶³ Cap. xxv (p. 103).

¹⁶⁴ Caps. xxviii-ix (pp. 113-118); cf. caps. viii (p. 35), ix (p. 37).

¹⁶⁵ Polixena (caps. ix, p. 37; xxiv, p. 98); Hero (cap. xxiv, p. 99); Canace (cap. xxv, p. 101); Helen (cap. xxvii, p. 110; cf. cap. viii, p. 35); Laodamia (cap. xxvii, p. 111); Penelope (cap. xxvii, p. 112); and Isolde (caps. xi, p. 46; xxix, p. 118). The ladies of the ballad *not* found in the *Amorosa Visione* are Esther, Marcia Catoun, Lucretia, and Hypermnestra.

¹⁶⁶ Caps. i, iii.

¹⁶⁷ Stanzas 72-75.

¹⁶⁸ Froissart, *Oeuvres*, ed. Scheler, I, 30.

¹⁶⁹ *Oeuvres*, II, 198.

¹⁷⁰ Ll. 2500-2640.

¹⁷¹ Ed. Schick, E. E. T. S., ll. 55 ff.

¹⁷² Ed. Sieper, E. E. T. S., Part I, p. 114.

There are lists of women who have had sorrow in love;¹⁷³ there are lists of false lovers.¹⁷⁴ And phrases of comparison based on these same familiar and distinguished stories are too numerous to mention.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Genievre, Yseult et Helaine,
Palas, Juno ne Medée,
Du Vergy la chastellaine,
Andromada ne Tisbée...
N'orent le mal ne la paine
Ne la dure destinée
Qui d'amours m'est destinée.

Deschamps, *Oeuvres*, II, 182.

Cf. Wherein was graven of stories many oon;
First how Phyllis, of womanly pitè,
Deyd pitously, for love of Demophoon.
Nexste after was the story of Tisbee,
How she slew her-self under a tree.
Yet saw I more, how in right pitous-cas
For Antony was slayn Cleopatras.

Assembly of Ladies, ll. 456-62 (*Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, p. 395).

¹⁷⁴ Plus trichierous qe Jason a Medée,
A Deianire ou q'Ereules estoit,
Plus q'Eneas, q'avoit Dido lessée,
Plus qe Theseüs, q'Adriagne amoit,
Ou Demophon, quant Phillis oublioit,
Je trieus, hélas, q'amer jadis soloie.

Gower, *Works*, ed. Macaulay, I, 371.

Cf. But false Jason, with his doubleness,
That was untrewé at Colkos to Medee,
And Theseus, rote of unkindenesse,
And with these two eek the false Enee; etc.

Lydgate, Complaint of the Black Knight (Chaucerian and Other Pieces, p. 256), ll. 372-75.

¹⁷⁵ E. g., Plus l'ama que Médée Jason (Machault, *Oeuvres*, ed. Tarbé, p. 60); Qu'onques Jason belle Médée, Ne Dido de Cartage Enée, N'aussi Byblis Cadmus, Né Helaine Paris, N'amerent tant... Com je t'aim (Machault, *Voir Dit*, p. 243); Car je t'aim plus que Hero Leandon ne Médée n'ama le preu Jason (Froissart, *Oeuvres*, ed. Scheler, I, 170); Onques Genevre, Yseut, Helainne, Ne Lucesse que fu Romaine... N'ama cascade tant le sien Que je fai toi (*ib.* II, 303); Ed alcuni sono, che dal biforme figliuolo feriti di Citea, chi per conforto, e quale per

Mr. Goddard's scruples about the ladies of the *Legend* do not seem, accordingly, to have been shared by Chaucer's contemporaries, and there is not a shred of evidence that they were shared by Chaucer himself. Indeed, if Chaucer's selection of his heroines is evidence of a desire on his part to play a joke on Cupid and to indulge surreptitiously in a "travesty on feminine virtue," then by the same token the Middle Ages in general were palpably touched with the same midsummer madness. Mr. Goddard has proved too much. "You paint your devils so impossibly black, my dear," says the Rector to his wife in Maurice Hewlett's *Halfway House*, "that really they refute themselves."

The Rector's remark applies aptly enough, not only to Mr. Goddard's procedure with the ladies of the *Legend*, but also, *mutatis mutandis*, to another aspect of his argument. It is perfectly true, as is observed with elaborately ironical caution, that "Chaucer (the statement is made after due deliberation) is a humorist."¹⁷⁶ And it is equally true that Chaucer's delightful and inimitable humor does frequently take the form of an ostensibly sober statement which really veils a playful turn or one that is (often elusively enough) ironical. Not to grant that is to plead crass and inexpiable ignorance of Chaucer. But Mr. Goddard, like Esais, is very bold: "This simple rule of Chaucerian criticism may be offered, applicable to the poet's later works, and, like the innocence of an accused man before the law, to be taken for granted and adhered to till positive evidence to the contrary is adduced: *Always* assume that Chaucer means the opposite of what he seems to say."¹⁷⁷ That is precisely the defeat of Mr. Goddard's method; his (or rather, his Chaucer's) impossibly ubiquitous *double-entendres* refute themselves. Chaucer

diletto cercando gli antichi amori, un'altra volta con il concupiscevole cuore trasfugano Elena, raccendono Didone, con Isifle piangono, ed ingannano con sollecita cura Medea (Boccaccio, *Opere Minori*, p. 143). Cf. Froissart, II, 389; Deschamps, III, 286, l. 1; 291, l. 9; 294, l. 11; 318, ll. 9-11; IV, 69, l. 5; X, xlviii, l. 15; etc., etc.

¹⁷⁶ VII, 4, p. 97.

¹⁷⁷ VIII, 1, p. 100 n. (*italics mine*). Since hills are good, let us abolish valleys!

is *always* "achieving one or his roguish ambiguities,"¹⁷⁸ *always* writing lines which are "the very embodiment of a wink,"¹⁷⁹ *always*—one may add—forgetting unaccountably that

. . . though the beste harpour upon lyve
Wolde on the beste souned joly harpe
That ever was, with alle his fingres fyve,
Touche ay o streng, or ay a werbul harpe,
Were his nayles poynted never so sharpe,
It shulde maken every wight to dulle,
To here his glee, and of his strokes fulle.¹⁸⁰

The result, one can but feel, would be somewhat distressing—were it true!

The same failure to observe the Chaucerian virtue of *measure* vitiates Mr. Goddard's often excellent remarks on "bringing modern preconceptions to a mediæval case."¹⁸¹ It is true enough that "Machault [is] a mediæval writer, so is Deschamps. And Machault and Deschamps are dead names on the dead pages of

¹⁷⁸ VIII, 1, p. 105.

¹⁷⁹ VIII, 1, p. 102 n.

¹⁸⁰ Vor hit is soth, Alvred hit seide,
And me hit mai in boke rede,
'Everich thing mai leosen his gownede
Mid unmethe and mid over-dede'

(*Owl and Nightingale*, ll. 349-52).

¹⁸¹ See esp. VIII, 1, pp. 107-09. To assert in the connection which it is given, that "*Chaucer* is something more than a mere 'mediæval case' " (p. 107; my italics) is, I fear it must be said, to set up, for the sake of its facile demolition, a man of straw. As a matter of fact, the "mediæval case" actually under discussion was not "*Chaucer*," but the familiar question of originality in the Middle Ages—as would have appeared had Mr. Goddard quoted the remainder of the sentence which he permits to end with the words which form his text (see *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xix, 658, n. 1). The deft gradations by which Mr. Goddard passes, on p. 107, from the Prologue (and particularly the daisy passage at that), through the *Legend* as a whole (in the next sentence), on to Chaucer himself (six lines below), in reaching his application of the phrase, are worthy of note!

literary history,¹⁸² while Chaucer is a living force in a still living world." And it is manifestly pertinent to ask "wherein consists the difference? . . . What is it about this work [*The Legend of Good Women*] which makes it so superior to these various French poems to which its many points of likeness have been shown?"¹⁸³ With the statement of the answer, moreover, one may substantially agree: "Surely (since they are dead) it is in its *differences from* them that we must seek its life." Those differences, the more striking for the likenesses, are salient enough in the Prologue, as no one who is familiar with the French poems need be told. But when such differences are sought, as Mr. Goddard seeks them, by transporting Chaucer bodily from his own century, one must beg leave to cherish doubts. Chaucer is—if I may venture, under the circumstances, my own confession of faith—in much of his work, the most *human* of all the poets that I know; if I were sure precisely what I meant by it, I should say in many aspects the most *modern* also. But astoundingly "modern" as he is, Chaucer is none the less "mediæval" too; which means no more than that he is a normal human being, living sanely and heartily in his own time. And being of his time, he often likes, seriously and unabashedly likes, a few things that bore us to extinction. Even when he does not actually *like* them, he sometimes passively accepts conventions that would give a twentieth century writer pause. But neither Chaucer nor one's love for him will suffer greatly from a recognition of the facts.

And in these facts there certainly is no warrant for the view that in the *Legend* Chaucer was composing "a most unmerciful satire upon women," "a mere travesty of feminine virtue." The poem must still be taken at its own word. That does not mean

¹⁸² One can but feel, however, that rhetoric has slightly outrun critical acumen in this dictum!

¹⁸³ Pp. 107-108. It must be noted, however, that Mr. Goddard persists in assuming that the whole *Legend*, and not merely the Prologue, is related to the French *marguerite* poems. Here as before (see above, p. 534) that is rather glaringly to beg the question and one is justified, I think, in expressing the wish that Mr. Goddard had seen fit to give the evidence for his contention.

that Chaucer's unfailing sense of humor was "thilke tyme," any more than any other time, asleep; it does not mean that Chaucer saw no irony in any of the situations he portrayed. To assert that would be to affirm that Chaucer was no longer Chaucer. But granted that, the ladies of the *Legend* were to Chaucer what they were to those for whom he wrote. He grew very tired of them, to be sure (one recalls the sigh of relief that followed even Grisilde!); but he accepted them at their conventional appraisal. As for the Prologue, Mr. Goddard has failed to show that it is anything else than just what it purports to be. One may still accept it gratefully for what (among other things) it is—Chaucer's consummate working out and betterment, by grace of his own genius and its inalienable humor, of suggestions drawn from a long line of poets—the "flour of hem that make in Fraunce."

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